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PHOTO: PTI

Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra to enter Jharkhand on 2 Feb

RANCHI, 27 JAN

Congress' 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' will enter Jharkhand on 2 February, and Rahul Gandhi is scheduled to address public meetings in Pakur district to kick off proceedings in the state, a party leader said on Saturday. The yatra will be held in two phases, covering 804km in 13 districts over eight days, Jharkhand Congress president Rajesh Thakur said. The route chart comprising venues for party meetings and rallies would be announced soon, he said. In a bid to take stock of preparations, Thakur and other senior state Congress leaders have been visiting districts. "We have already visited Ramgarh, Dhanbad, Deoghar, Dumka and Pakur to review the preparations and arrangements," Thakur said. 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', which started in Manipur on 14 January, is scheduled to cover 6,713km in 67 days, passing through 110 districts in 15 states, before culminating in Mumbai on 20 March. *—PTI*

Cal HC bench Vs bench clash: SC takes charge

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

After an embarrassing tussle between two benches of Calcutta High Court over the institution of a CBI investigation into alleged irregularities in the issuance of caste certificates to candidates aspiring for reserved category seats, Supreme Court on Saturday said it is taking "charge" and stayed all proceedings pending there. A five-judge bench of the apex court chaired by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud sat on a holiday to address the dispute where a defiant judge overruled an order of a division bench that had quashed his direction for a CBI probe and asked the central agency to go ahead with the investigation. Justice Abhijit Gandopadhyay had accused brother judge Soumen Sen of the division bench of pandering to the interests of West Bengal's ruling party to overrule his order for a CBI probe. Court constituted a five-judge bench and decided to hold a special sitting on Saturday to resolve the issue. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

PHOTO: PTI

1 village volunteer killed in gunfight in Manipur

IMPHAL, 27 JAN

One village volunteer was killed and two were injured during a gunfight between two armed groups in Manipur's Kangpokpi district on Saturday morning, police said. The gunfight broke out after armed miscreants entered the vicinity of the hill village of Satang Kuki and launched a gun and bomb attack. The fighting stopped after the attackers retreated following the arrival of additional backup forces at Satang village, they said. The injured has been taken to a private hospital in Imphal. One of the injured people received splinter injuries on the face and another on his thigh, hospital sources said. *—PTI*

Nitish may resign today, RJD, Congress in a huddle

Prior to resignation, Nitish will hold a customary party meet

PATNA/NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Nitish asked govt offices to remain open on Sunday that may see a new government with the BJP's support *PHOTO: PTI*

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Saturday appeared all set to make his second political volte-face in less than three years, with a highly-placed source close to Kumar saying that the JD (U) President is likely to tender his resignation by Sunday morning.

The comments came even as RJD leaders held extensive deliberations over the course of action to be followed in the event of Kumar calling off the alliance and returning to the BJP-led NDA.

Before submitting his resignation, Kumar will hold a customary meeting of the legislature party, the source added.

He also said government offices like the secretariat have been asked to remain open on Sunday "in view of hectic activity expected during the day" that may see the installation of a new government with the BJP's support.

Meanwhile, Janata Dal (United)'s political adviser and spokesperson KC Tyagi told reporters in Delhi that the grand alliance government in Bihar is on the verge of collapse, and accused a section of the Congress leadership of repeatedly "insulting" Kumar.

Also on Saturday, state BJP leaders, who held a meeting in Patna, stopped short of making any formal announcement of support to the JD (U) Chief in the event of his pulling out of the Mahagathbandhan.

- RJD leaders gathered at the residence of national Vice-President and former chief minister Rabri Devi, who shares her government bungalow

Requesting anonymity, BJP sources said instructions have been received from the top leadership to put on hold "any formal announcement" till Kumar, who had dumped the NDA less than three years ago, put in his papers.

For Kumar, who has maintained a deafening silence over the turmoil in the 'Mahagathbandhan', ignoring pleas from allies RJD, Congress and the Left to clear the air about the intense political speculation on his future step, it was business as usual.

RJD leaders gathered at the residence of national Vice-President and former chief minister Rabri Devi, who shares her government bungalow with Tejashwi Yadav, her son, and husband Lalu Prasad, who is the party President.

While some RJD leaders are said to be in favour of staking claim to form the new government, hoping to cobble up the support of eight MLAs the 'Mahagathbandhan' requires to go past the majority mark, others, including Tejashwi Yadav, appear to be not impressed with the idea since the JD(U) and the BJP together have more than 122 members in the 243-strong assembly. *—PTI*

REDDY'S GUARANTEE

T'gana govt to take up caste census soon

HYDERABAD, 27 JAN

Revanth Reddy *PHOTO: PTI*

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Saturday said the state government would soon take up caste census as promised to people before elections.

Reddy, who held a meeting on issues concerning minorities, backward classes and tribal welfare departments, directed officials to take steps for carrying out the caste census, an official release said.

Reddy also asked officials to prepare budget estimates for implementing 'Kalyanamastu' scheme of providing one tola gold in addition to financial assistance of Rs one lakh to girls from BPL families at the time of their marriage.

He directed officials to prepare estimates on the funds required for all types of government welfare hostels being run by the government.

He said funds would be released in 'green channel' (expeditious release of funds) as per the estimated expenditure.

He instructed officials to furnish details on the government residential schools which are being run in rented buildings and also to identify lands for construction of own buildings.

He said the funds required for construction of buildings can also be estimated.

Reddy also suggested officials study the proposals for establishment of a coaching centre for backward classes for one Parliamentary constituency.

He also told officials to set up an 'integrated education hub' comprising SC, ST, BC welfare residential educational institutions instead of having them separately. This would help in better maintenance and supervision, the release added. *—PTI*

Jarange ends fast over Maratha quota

MUMBAI, 27 JAN

Manoj Jarange *PHOTO: PTI*

- Jarange, spearheading the agitation for reservation for the Marathas since last August, has been demanding Kunbi certificates for all Marathas

Activist Manoj Jarange on Saturday called off his indefinite fast for Maratha quota after the Maharashtra government accepted his demands, with Chief Minister Eknath Shinde announcing that till Marathas get reservation, they will be given all the benefits enjoyed by the OBCs.

But a draft notification issued by the government following negotiations with Jarange, stating that blood relatives of a Maratha person, who has records to show that he belongs to the agrarian Kunbi community, would also be recognised as Kunbi, evoked criticism from senior Minister Chhagan Bhujbal who questioned the "backdoor entry" of Marathas into the OBC category.

Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis tried to assuage concerns of the OBCs, stating that Marathas would not get Kunbi caste certificate without any proof.

Jarange had launched his fast at Vashi in Navi Mumbai, a satellite city of Mumbai, on Friday, in the presence of thousands of his supporters.

He had set out on a protest march from his native Antarwali Sarati village in Jalna district last Saturday. The 40-year-old activist originally planned to stage a hunger strike at Azad Maidan in South Mumbai from 26 January.

On reaching Vashi on Friday morning, the ₹morcha' made an overnight halt but Jarange warned that they would enter Mumbai on Saturday for their planned protest if their demands were not met.

The draft notification which came out on Saturday fulfilled one of Jarange's key demands, that all blood relatives of a Maratha person, whose Kunbi caste records have already been found, would also be recognised as Kunbi.

Jarange, spearheading the agitation for reservation for the Marathas since last August, has been demanding Kunbi certificates for all Marathas.

In the morning, Jarange said he was withdrawing his agitation as the government had accepted all his demands. *—PTI*

'₹25cr offered to AAP MLAs to topple govt'

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

AAP on Saturday alleged that BJP has offered Rs 25 crore each to seven of its MLAs in Delhi to quit the party while also threatening to topple the Kejriwal government.Delhi BJP, however, rubbished the allegation and challenged AAP to name the MLAs and the people who allegedly contacted them with the offer.Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) claimed that the recording of a person who contacted one of the party MLAs was available and will be shown later. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal posted on 'X' that seven of his party MLAs had been contacted by "them" and warned that the AAP convener would be arrested soon.Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva hit back saying, "This shows how much politically desperate Kejriwal has become. This allegation by him is an attempt to keep himself politically alive. The allegation that the BJP wants to break away MLAs of AAP, having 62 out of 70 MLAs in Delhi, shows his mental bankruptcy." *—PTI*

LDF VS GUV

Ker Guv gets Z+ security cover after SFI protest

Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan stages a sit-in protest at a tea shop in Kollam on Saturday *PHOTO: PTI*

T'PURAM/KOLLAM, 27 JAN

High drama played out in Kollam district of Kerala on Saturday when Governor Arif Mohammed Khan, facing SFI's black flag protest, got out of his car, took on the agitating Left student wing members, sat on the roadside and hit out at the Chief Minister in what seemed to be yet another chapter in the Raj Bhavan vs the ruling LDF face-off.

Meanwhile, the Centre on Saturday extended Z+ security cover to Khan, who lashed out at Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan for "promoting lawlessness".A visibly irked Khan, on his way to Kottarakkara for an event, got out of his car at Nilamel, took on the agitating members of the Students Federation of India and sat on the roadside demanding police action against the activists of the CPI-M-affiliated SFI for staging a black flag protest against him.

While the BJP threw its weight behind Khan, State General Education Minister V Sivankutty said no Governor of any state in the country has behaved in this manner. The Congress-led UDF on the other hand said this was all part of the ongoing political drama of the state government and the Governor.

Accusing Vijayan of "promoting lawlessness in the state", Khan said, "as head of the state, lawlessness shall not be tolerated". The Governor also said the "attacks" against him were being organised "to divert attention from the Left government's failures and provoke some drastic action (from him)". "I am not going to oblige them," he said.Governor also termed the SFI activists as "goondas" and "daily wagers" of the Marxist veteran and the Left party. "You go and show the black flag, hit the car, come back and take your payment," he said.

After sitting there for over two hours, Khan left the place only after the police showed him a copy of the FIR registered against 17 SFI activists under non-bailable provisions of the law.

Less than an hour after what happened in Nilamel, the Kerala Raj Bhavan announced that the Ministry of Home Affairs has extended the Z+ security cover of CRPF personnel to Khan.

Khan said he has no problems with protests as long as the black flags are waved from afar. "But why hit my car? I had said earlier in Thiruvananthapuram that if you hit my car, I would get down. They hit my car today (on Saturday)," he alleged. *—PTI*

POK TERROR MODULE BUSTED IN J&K BY POLICE

SRINAGAR, 27 JAN

Police have busted a terror module operating from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir by arresting five terrorist associates in Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara district, officials said on Saturday.

Acting on credible information, police arrested a suspect who was involved in the smuggling of arms and ammunition sent to this side by two Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) handlers based in PoK.

The PoK-based LeT terrorist handlers have been identified as Manzoor Ahmad Sheikh alias Shakoor and Qazi Mohammad Khushal, both residents of Karnah, their local conduit was identified as Zahoor Ahmad Bhat, a resident of Karnah.

One AK series rifle, two pistols and some ammunition were recovered from the arrested person. "The consignments dispatched to this side were thereafter delivered to other terror associates who were in contact with Zahoor Ahmad Bhat and the PoK-based handlers as well. Based on further leads, four more terror associates were arrested," the official said. He said the arrested terror associates were identified as Khursheed Ahmad Rather, Mudassir Shafiq, Ghulam Sarwar Rather and Qazi Fazal Illahi, all residents of Karnah. *—PTI*

Kerala CM slams Guv for breaking protocol

T'PURAM, 27 JAN

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Saturday said Governor Arif Mohammed Khan stepping out of his vehicle was against security protocols and he should not have done that.

Vijayan also said Governor Khan has been repeatedly taking a stand contrary to the democratic principles. The CM also termed as "strange" the handing over of the Governor's security to CRPF and said Khan now was part of a group that till now comprised some RSS workers who enjoy the special protection provided by the Centre.

Vijayan also pointed out that no position of authority was above the law. "Law is supreme," he said.

The CM was responding to reporters' queries regarding what transpired at Nilamel in Kollam district of the state in the morning. *—PTI*

HISTORY ETCHED!

City boy, Ebden win their 1st Grand Slam title at AO

MELBOURNE, 27 JAN

Bopanna and Ebden won 7-6(0) 7-5 against Itay's Bolelli and Vavassori in final that lasted one hour and 39 minutes *PHOTO: PTI*

- Bopanna was playing his third men's doubles final at Grand Slam events, having ended runner-up at US Open twice

Rohan Bopanna became only the third Indian to win a men's doubles Grand Slam title, taking the Australian Open crown with partner Matthew Ebden following a commanding win over Simone Bolelli and Andrea Vavassori, here on Saturday. In a high-quality game of tennis, second seeded Bopanna and Ebden won 7-6(0) 7-5 against the Italian team in the final that lasted one hour and 39 minutes. Only the iconic Leander Paes and Mahesh Bhupathi have won Major titles for India in men's tennis while trailblazer Sania Mirza did it in women's tennis.

For Bopanna it is his second Grand Slam title, having won the French Open mixed doubles trophy with Canada's Gabriela Dabrowski in 2017. At 43, Bopanna also became the oldest Grand Slam champion in men's tennis. He bettered the record of Jean-Julien Rojer who, at age of 40, had lifted the French Open men's doubles trophy in 2022 with Marcelo Arevola.

Bopanna was playing his third men's doubles final at Grand Slam events, having ended runner-up at US Open twice (2013, 2023). "A couple of years ago I said in a video message, I am going to call it a day because I was not winning matches. I went five months without winning a match. I thought that was the end of my journey but my perseverance, and (something) inside me kept me going," Bopanna said after his triumph."It really changed so many things, I got a wonderful partner to get me to all the laurels," he added. Bopanna is already assured of becoming the new number one on Monday when the ATP rankings will be updated. At 43, he will be the oldest player to be perched on top of the ranking pile. *—PTI*

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PHOTO: X

KC General Hospital gets free dialysis unit

BENGALURU, 27 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday inaugurated a free dialysis facility started by Health and Family Welfare Department at KC General Hospital here on Saturday. Meanwhile, the government will open 219 new dialysis centres in the State and 800 new dialysis machines will be installed. Of the 800 new dialysis machines, 250 units will be allocated to Bengaluru division, 201 to Belagavi, 222 to Mysuru, and 127 to Kalaburgi. The scheme is expected to cost Rs 108 crore annually and it will be funded by Pradhan Mantri National Dialysis Programme and the health department. Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao and Siddaramaiah visited the patients undergoing dialysis at KC General Hospital.

—Salar News

PHOTO: IANS

Disabled man conspires to kill father, 4 held

BAGALKOT, 27 JAN

A physically challenged individual, accompanied by his wife, allegedly orchestrated a conspiracy to eliminate his own father over a land dispute. The accused have been identified as Channabasappa, his wife Shivabasavva, their friend Ramesh Managoli, and the contracted killer, Mahantesh. The victim, identified as Chennappa, aged 66, fell prey to the crime, reportedly stemming from a prolonged dispute over the division of more than 30 acres of land.According to police reports, Channabasappa purportedly offered a sum of 3 lakhs to Mahantesh to execute the act. The incident unfolded on Thursday near Rampura Village, where Mahantesh brutally attacked Chennappa with a machete and subsequently bludgeoned him with a stone.Following an interrogation, the authorities brought the incident to light on Saturday, leading to the prompt arrest of the four people involved in this plot.

—Salar News

MBBS student dies after his car overturns

DHARWAD, 27 JAN

A MBBS student lost his life after his car overturned in the early hours of Saturday. The deceased, identified as Deepak,30, was accompanied by his friend Vinay, who sustained severe injuries and has been shifted to a private hospital for treatment.The accident happened near Mummigatti Village on the outskirts of the city. According to the police, the incident occurred due to repair work on the road, leading to a deviation route from the National Highway. Unfortunately, in a rush, the victim failed to notice the deviation sign and entered the under-construction road.As Deepak attempted to stop the car, he lost control, causing it to hit the edge of the road and overturn. Deepak tragically succumbed to his injuries at the hospital. He was a student at SDM College in Dharwad and hailed from Yadgir district.

—Salar News

LS polls will be a turning point for BJP: Yediyurappa

Will win all 28 seats and support PM Modi, says BJP leader

BENGALURU, 27 JAN

Former chief minister and senior leader BS Yediyurappa on Saturday said the upcoming Lok Sabha election will be a turning point for BJP. "In the 2019 elections, BJP won 26 out of the 28 seats. It was the people's wish and power. This time, we will win all the 28 seats and support Prime Minister Narendra Modi," Yediyurappa said during BJP's State Executive Meeting in Palace Grounds here.

He requested all the workers and members of BJP present in the meeting to support Modi.

About the Congress government in Karnataka, Yediyurappa said the governance has collapsed in the State. "The Congress government which came to power by misleading the people is now involved in conflicts. Due to their quarrel, corruption is rampant and there are absolutely no development works happening in the State," the former chief minister said.

Calling the Congress government a failure, he said, "The government has not been able to wipe the tears of the farmers during drought and protect the dignity of the women. It is impossible to sit back and watch all this. We will fight and win for the people of the State."

BJP State President BY Vijayendra said the immediate target before them is the upcoming Lok Sabha election. "We cannot take our opponents lightly. We need to put our achievements on the forefront and work day and night to secure victory," Vijayendra said.

About the Ram Mandir inauguration in Ayodhya on 22 January, Vijayendra said, "Under the leadership of our proud Prime Minister Modi, the constant struggle of the last few decades came to an end. There is an atmosphere all over the country where Hindus are celebrating Lord Ram. In such an auspicious time, BJP is in the centrestage and for the last nine-and-a-half years, the government has given good governance without corruption."

Vijayendra accused Congress party of not trying to stop terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. "Jammu and Kashmir has been rocked by militant activities for several years. It was done by the Congress to portray that if Article 370 was abolished there would be chaos. Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah's bold decisions uprooted the financial support to such militant activities," the State President said.

Union Minister Bhupendra Singh, who was also present at the event, said the people of the country have understood that Modi's guarantees are real. " People of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh have rejected Congress party's false guarantees," said Singh, referring to the recent Assembly elections to five states, Singh said. The Union Minister said he is confident that Modi will be back in power with 400 seats in the upcoming elections.

—Salar News

Ex-CM BS Yediyurappa, BJP State President BY Vijayendra, Opposition leader R Ashoka, Union Ministers Prahlad Joshi and Bhupender Yadav and others during BJP Executive Committee Meeting in Bengaluru **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

- Former chief minister and senior leader BS Yediyurappa on Saturday said the upcoming Lok Sabha election will be a turning point for BJP. "In the 2019 elections, BJP won 26 out of the 28 seats. It was the people's wish and power. This time, we will win all the 28 seats and support Prime Minister Narendra Modi," Yediyurappa said

LS polls: RS MP Agarwal to be incharge of Karnataka

Bengaluru, 27 Jan

BJP on Saturday appointed Rajya Sabha MP Radha Mohan Das Agarwal as incharge and Andhra Pradesh MLC Sudhakar Reddy as co-incharge for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka. In-charges for all 28 Lok Sabha seats in the State were also appointed during the State Executive Meeting held in Bengaluru on Saturday. Former deputy chief minister CN Ashwath Narayan was made incharge of Mysuru- Kodagu constituency while former home minister Araga Jnanendra was given the responsibility of Udupi-Chikkamagaluru constituency and MLC Srinivas Pujari given Dakshina Kannada. Bengaluru South constituency will be under MLA M Krishnappa, Bengaluru North under MLA SR Vishwanath and Dharwad under Rajya Sabha MP Iranna Kadadi. The newly appointed in-charges include one Rajya Sabha MP, 12 MLAs, four MLCs, two former MLCs and six former MLAs. One MLA and MLC, three former MLA and MLCs have been named as moderators.

—Salar News

Appointments to B&C only after consultations: DKS

BENGALURU, 27 JAN

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar today said the appointments to Boards and Corporations were done only after taking everyone's opinion.

Speaking to reporters at his official residence in Kumara Park, he said, "Appointments to Boards and Corporations were finalised only after collecting opinions of all. The Chief Minister, General Secretary and myself had thoroughly discussed the choices. Many leaders had even given letters recommending certain people for the positions, but we can't make the letters public," he said.

"Everyone has the aspiration and ambition for position and power. The tenure of these positions is only for two years and there will be fresh appointments once again after two years. We will give opportunities to fresh faces then. Party leaders and workers have to manage the responsibility given by the party. There is no need to worry, the hard working party workers will be rewarded in the next list," he noted.

"39 MLAs have been accommodated in the first list as per the promises made by the party. We can't say we have satisfied everyone as there were 2-3 aspirants for each position. Some have been accommodated now and the rest will be accommodated for the next tenure. We will keep our word. We have created new positions to accommodate more party workers. Party workers will be given opportunities in hospital committees, bagar hukum committees, ashraya committees and municipalities.

There is no need for the media to create unnecessary confusion in this matter.

Q&A

Asked if the Sports minister would be the default head of the Karnataka Sports Authority, he said, "The bylaw was introduced during SM Krishna's time, it would be amended shortly." Replying to a reporter's query on MLA Narendra Swamy's appointment, he said, "The matter is in the court. He would be accommodated once the case is cleared."

Congress will win Shivamogga

Replying to a reporter who pointed out that Shyamanur Shivashankarappa has endorsed B Y Raghavendra for Shivamooga parliamentary constituency, he said, "I don't know he has said. But Congress will win Shivamogga seat. Congress will win more seats than the Opposition in Karnataka this time."

Shettar had called for the eradication of BJP Asked about Jagadish Shettar's call to eradicate Congress, he said, "The same Jagadish Shettar had called for the eradication of the BJP when he was in our party."

—Salar News

ON A DIFFERENT PITCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah plays cricket to inaugurate Print Media Cup Cricket Tournament in Bengaluru on Saturday **PHOTO: SALAR**

Will try to keep INDIA bloc united, says Cong President

KALABURAGI, 27 JAN

Congress President M Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday said his party expects that those who have the desire to protect the country's Constitution and democracy will definitely not take any hasty steps, amid indications that JD(U) was planning to revert to BJP-led NDA.

He said the Congress will make all efforts to keep the INDIA bloc united, while maintaining that he has no clarity as to what is in the JD(U) leadership's mind.

On the possibility of JD(U) going out of the INDIA alliance, Kharge said, "Are they (JD(U)) going out? I have not got any information about it so far. I have written a letter to them (JD(U) leadership) and have tried to talk to them."

The Congress President said, "I'm going to Dehradun tomorrow (on Sunday) and from there to Delhi. Once I go there, I will gather complete information about it and talk to you, otherwise it may lead to confusion..... Let's see what happens."

Mallikarjun Kharge **PHOTO: X**

About the possibility of the JD(U) joining hands with BJP to form a new government in Bihar, Kharge said, "We don't have that information. Whether they have gone to the Governor or whether they are going, they have not informed us. If the INDIA alliance had information about it, I could say authentically, or else it would add to speculations. Let's see what happens."

Stating that the Congress' effort to the unity of the INDIA alliance should not break, he said, "It's my appeal, I have made this appeal. I have spoken to Mamata Banerjee (West Bengal CM and Trinamool Congress Chief), him (Bihar CM and JD(U) Chief Nitish Kumar), Lalu Prasad Yadav (RJD Chief), Sitaram Yechury (CPI(M) General Secretary), and others."

"I have told them that we have to stay united, only then we can give a good fight, and the INDIA alliance can be successful in fulfilling the intentions with which it was formed. We expect that those who have the desire to protect this country's Constitution and democracy, will definitely not take any hasty steps. This is my feeling, we will make all efforts," he added.

—PTI

DyCM vows reservoir project at Navali

KOPPAL/ BENGALURU, 27 JAN

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Saturday said the government is committed to establishing a parallel reservoir at Navali for Tungabhadra river. "I have written to the Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana asking for time to discuss the parallel reservoir," Shivakumar said in Koppal.

Shivakumar said the district minister, and MLAs of Koppal and Ballari districts have demanded the establishment of a parallel reservoir. "Ministers of three states should discuss before taking up the project. The ministers of Andhra Pradesh are busy with elections, they are yet to give us time," the Deputy Chief Minister said.

Reacting to Jagadish Shettar's decision to join BJP back, Shivakumar said: "Shettar came to our party because BJP did injustice to him. We treated him with respect and gave him a ticket and people supported him. Let him now answer all the statements he made against BJP in the past."

—Salar News

Purple Line's glitch leave commuters irked

BENGALURU, 27 JAN

Commuters on the Purple Line between MG Road and Baiyappanahalli were affected this morning. Metro services were had been halted between 9.30and 10.30am, a technical glitch caused a delay, leaving passengers momentarily stranded.

However, Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited. (BMRCL) officials quickly looked into the issue, and trains were back on track by 11am, alleviating the disruption.

A BMRCL official told **Salar news** "This was caused due to power supply cut, a problem that we have faced beforepriorly. We had taken immediate action and the services resumed after an hour. We apologise for the inconvenience it might have caused to the public."While one line had encountered a temporary-halt, another is gearing up for a major leap forward.

—Salar News

Yatnal flays govt over closure of his factory

BENGALURU, 27 JAN

Vijayapura MLA Basanagouda Yatnal has lashed out at Congress government after Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) issued a notice to close down his sugar factory in Kalaburagi district.

KSPCB ordered the district administration to close down Siddhashri Sahakari Niyamita sugar factory in Chincholi and instructed the electricity supply company to stop the power supply as the factory violated environment rules. KSPCB said the factory was releasing untreated waste into waterbodies.

Yatnal said the Congress government could not face them politically, and because of this they issued the notice to close down the factory. "The factory has been set up to help farmers and create employment in backward localities. Propaganda is the last resort for people who cannot achieve anything. I am not afraid of the notices and orders. I am now empowered to fight against the Congress administration," Yatnal said.

—Salar News

R-Day performance falls prey to political objections

HASSAN, 27 JAN

A cultural dance performance during the 75th Republic Day celebrations at Araseikere,in Hassan district, took an unexpected turn when the lotus flower dance, symbolising national unity, was embroiled in a political controversy. Students of Chandrasekhara Bharati School, who presented a performance with the national bird peacock and the national flower lotus, faced criticism from Congress MLA Shivlinge Gowda. Gowda, associating the lotus flower with the BJP's symbol, objected to its inclusion in the dance.

—Salar News

SAFETY THROWN TO THE WIND

Lack of CCTV cameras put passengers in BMTC buses at risk

MEGHNA PRASAD
BENGALURU, 27 JAN

Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC), responsible for public transportation in India's tech capital, finds itself in a bind. Around 20% (1,500 buses) of the BMTC fleet of 6,500 buses do not have CCTV cameras installed in them, raising concerns about passenger security and deterring some, especially women, from using public transport.

Adding to the security concern, a significant portion of the CCTV-enabled 5,000 buses do not have cameras in working condition.

Sunitha Jain, Public Relations Officer of BMTC told Salar News, that funding is a major concern for the lack of CCTV coverage in all the buses. "The funding given to us has fallen short and BMTC's resources are stretched thin. The technical glitches and maintenance issues also render some existing cameras inoperable. Furthermore, a lack of proper monitoring weakens the effectiveness of even functional cameras," Jain said.

Around 20% (1,500 buses) of the BMTC fleet of 6,500 buses do not have CCTV cameras installed in them **PHOTO: X**

This uneven distribution leaves many passengers vulnerable. The lack of visual surveillance emboldens potential harassers and creates an environment of anxiety for many passengers. This not only impacts individual well-being but also discourages ridership, hindering the City's public transport goals.

- Around 20% (1,500 buses) of the BMTC fleet of 6,500 buses do not have CCTV cameras installed in them, raising concerns about passenger security and deterring some, especially women, from using public transport.

Many women find it hard to travel without any safety measures, especially during the night. Sheela Williams, a homemaker, told Salar News: "Sometimes the bus will be filled with so much crowd that I won't even know who is touching whom. At the same time if the bus does not have a CCTV camera, then it is even more inconvenient for me to travel."

Offering free travel alone will not be sufficient for women, said Lakshmi S, a therapist working at a healing centre in City. "It's not only about the physical harassment that we have to be worried about, it is even the non-physical things that we have to be worried about. Sometimes men stare at me as though they have never seen a girl in their life," she said.

The lack of CCTV cameras makes travelling a nightmare at night, said Moni A, a regular commuter with BMTC. "The problem is not just about petty crimes like theft and robbery. It is about our safety as well. We travel during the night as well, and with the lack of proper cameras we cannot even take the risk of travelling at that hour alone."

—Salar News

PHOTO: PTI

Delhi court summons Rabri Devi, daughter

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Delhi Court on Saturday summoned former Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi and her daughters Misa Bharti and Hema Yadav along with others after taking cognisance of an Enforcement Directorate charge sheet against them in the railways land-for-jobs linked money laundering case. Special Judge Vishal directed the accused to appear before the court on 9 February, saying there were sufficient grounds to proceed in the matter. The judge also issued a production warrant against businessman Amit Katyal, who is presently in judicial custody in the case. An alleged "close associate" of the Yadav family Katyal, beneficiary Hridayanand Chaudhary, two firms have also been named in the charge sheet.—*PTI*

Kharge writes to Mamata on RaGa's safety on Yatra

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Apprehending trouble by miscreants during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in West Bengal, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge has written to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee seeking appropriate directions to ensure its smooth passage through the state and safety of the yatris, including Rahul Gandhi. In his letter, he expressed fear that some miscreants may try to show the state administration in bad light as had happened in some other states. He said Congress has embarked on the Yatra from Manipur to Maharashtra to spread the message of justice to heal and unite the nation. He said the BYatra went across the country without any untoward incident and culminated in a rally in Kashmir.—*PTI*

Army gets first woman Subedar

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Havildar Preeti Rajak, who is a champion trap shooter, has become the first woman to hold the rank of Subedar in the Indian Army after she was promoted on Sunday. Subedar Rajak joined the Army in the Corps of Military Police in December 2022. "In a proud moment for the Indian Army as well as women of the country, today Havildar Preeti Rajak, trap shooter, was promoted to the rank of Subedar," the Army said. "Subedar Preeti Rajak is now the first woman Subedar of the Indian Army. Her achievement is an extraordinary display of Nari Shakti," it said. Subedar Preeti Rajak joined the Army in the Corps of Military Police on December 22, 2022. She was the first meritorious sportswomen in the shooting discipline enrolled in the Army as a Havildar. —*PTI*

Farmer ends life during protest over dam in Maharashtra

AMRAVATI, 27 JAN

A 44-year-old farmer died by suicide at the site of a protest, being held in connection with a dam, in Maharashtra's Amravati district on Saturday, a police official said. A group of farmers, apparently affected by Upper Wardha dam, were staging protest at Morshi in the district over compensation, said Superintendent of Police Vishal Anand. The dam is located about 50km from the district headquarters. One of the protesting farmers hanged himself at the stage erected for the protest in the early hours of Saturday, Anand said. After the farmer's suicide, the protesters blocked vehicular movement in the area.The protesters from Morshi were demanding four acres of farmland for each villager whose land was acquired for the dam project and government jobs for the project-affected people, an official had said. —*PTI*

INDIA bloc slam BJP, Stalin stresses on unity

Recently, TMC & AAP said that they would go solo in WB and Punjab respectively for LS polls

TIRUCHIRAPPALLI, 27 JAN

Amid rumblings in Opposition INDIA bloc, leaders stressed on the need to defeat the ruling BJP in the coming Lok Sabha polls, with DMK chanting the unity mantra to achieve the goal.

Top leaders of some of INDIA bloc constituents--Congress, DMK, the Left parties and Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi attended a "Democracy will win" conference organised by the VCK here on Friday.

VCK, headed by Lok Sabha MP Thol Thirumavalavan, is a key ally of the DMK in Tamil Nadu.

DMK President and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, leaders of the CPI (M) and the CPI, Sitaram Yechury and D Raja, respectively and many others spoke at the well-attended conference which came amidst the ruling Mahagathbandhan in Bihar appearing to be on tenterhooks with strong indications that JD(U) President and that state Chief MinisterNitish Kumar may do yet another volte-face and return to the BJP-led NDA. JD(U), Lalu Prasad Yadav-led RJD, Congress and Left parties are the constituents of the ruling coalition in Bihar.

Recently, two other constituents of the INDIA grouping-- Trinamool Congress (TMC) and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had announced they would not join hands with the Congress in West Bengal and Punjab, respectively, for the coming Lok Sabha elections.

In his address, Stalin said INDIA bloc leaders have to realise that when the BJP was rattled at the prospect of a win for the Opposition alliance even at the level of a mayor poll in Chandigarh, unity among constituents will dislodge the saffron party from power at the Centre.

Citing the postponement of Chandigarh mayor polls and the tie-up between the AAP and Congress there, he said the BJP-led Central government 'cancelled' even a mayor-level election as the scenario was ripe for victory. The media billed the later deferred civic election as the 'to-be first victory' of the INDIA alliance.

Kharge was quoted as saying that Ambedkar foresaw the dangers of blind devotion; be it in politics or religion. The architect of the Constitution warned against the cult of personality and emphasised on the need for "rational thinking and a commitment to justice in our political discourse."

Kharge made these remarks after slamming the BJP regime on various counts, wherein he outlined the challenges and the strain on federal structure.

Yechury said the INDIA bloc was committed to safeguarding the character of our republic and Tamil Nadu was leading the country in putting up a united fight against the BJP. —*PTI*

Leaders of some of INDIA bloc--Congress, DMK, the Left parties and Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi attended a "Democracy will win" conference organised by the VCK on Friday PHOTO: PTI

SP offers 11 Lok Sabha seats to Congress in UP

LUCKNOW, 27 JAN

Samajwadi Party on Saturday announced that it has offered 11 Lok Sabha seats to the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, with former chief minister Akhilesh Yadav asserting that their alliance is "off to a good start". UP Congress President Ajay Rai said that the decision on the matter will be taken by his party's national leadership. Yadav said on X, "Our cordial alliance with the Congress is off to a good start with 11 strong seats. This trend will move forward with the winning equation. 'INDIA' team and 'PDA' (Picchda, Dalit, Alpsankhyak) strategy will change history." —*PTI*

BJP HITS CAMPAIGN TRAIL IN J&K, MOCKS INDIA BLOC

SRINAGAR, 27 JAN

The BJP hitscampaign trail in Jammu and Kashmir with aim of winning all five Lok Sabha seats in the Union Territory, senior party leader Ashok Kaul said on Saturday.

"We have started the work for the forthcoming elections. The party has appointed Nirmal Singh as the sector in-charge for the five Lok Sabha seats in Jammu and Kashmir," Kaul told reporters at Anantnag after a party meeting. He said BJP will open six election offices in the five constituencies which will start functioning from 30 January.

Commenting on the INDIA bloc, Kaul said that his party has maintained from the beginning that it was just a photo opportunity. "We have said it from the start that this INDIA alliance is a photo session. Bengal (TMC) has gone one way, Punjab and Delhi (AAP) have gone the other way, while the one they had made convenor is also wavering back and forth. Today, the alliance is nowhere," he said.

Kaul said that a Gupkar alliance was formed in Jammu and Kashmir but that is also falling apart. —*PTI*

INDIA bloc collapsing in Bihar, says JD(U)

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

- It is not yet clear if and when Kumar is joining hands with the BJP, Tyagi said. He also said he could not see as to how the INDIA bloc parties could fight the BJP

JD(U) on Saturday made it clear that the INDIA bloc government in Bihar is on the brink of fall as its Spokesperson KC Tyagi hit out at the Congress for repeatedly "insulting" Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and said he sees no possibility of the Opposition putting up a real fight to the "all-powerful" BJP.

Amid ample signs that the BJP is warming up to do business with Kumar again, the party is also facing the task of keeping its smaller allies like Chirag Paswan and Upendra Kushwaha, both staunch critics of the JD(U) President, in a good humour.In a meeting with Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president JP Nadda, Lok Janshakti Party (Ramvilas) leader Chirag Paswan raised some concerns and is learnt to have sought assurance that his party will not have to compromise on its share of seats in the Lok Sabha polls after Kumar's entry in the National Democratic Alliance.

Paswan later told reporters he has received assurances on several of his issues but added that he will finalise his party's stand on developments in Bihar after the situation becomes clear.

It is not yet clear if and when Kumar is joining hands with the BJP, he said.As the leaders of BJP, RJD and the JD(U) held meetings in Patna amid the possibility of Kumar resigning on Sunday and then announcing a tie-up with the former ally, his close aide Tyagi clearly indicated that his party is all set to dump the INDIA bloc.

"The INDIA bloc is on the verge of collapse. The alliance of INDIA bloc parties is almost over in Punjab, West Bengal and Bihar," he told reporters.

Tyagi said he could not see as to how the INDIA bloc parties could fight the BJP.Kumar had snapped ties with BJP in 2022 to join hands with the RJD-Congress-Left alliance.

Paswan also wants that any new NDA government in the state headed by Kumar should have an agenda drawing from the positions of all allies, sources said. —*PTI*

BJP names poll in-charges for 23 states

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

BJP on Saturday appointed election in-charges and co-in-charges for 23 states and Union territories in view of the Lok Sabha polls this year.

BJP national General Secretary Vinod Tawde has been made the election in-charge for Bihar, while BJP Rajya Sabha member and former Jharkhand unit chief Deepak Prakash will be the co-in-charge, according to a party statement.

Tawde is the BJP's in-charge for political affairs in Bihar.

BJP has appointed Vice President Baijayant Jay Panda as the election in-charge for Uttar Pradesh and national general secretary Dushyant Kumar Gautam as that of Uttarakhand.

BJP national Vice President and Rajya Sabha member Laxmikant Bajpai will be the election in-charge for Jharkhand, the statement said.

The appointments have been made by BJP President JP Nadda in view of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, it said.

BJP Rajya Sabha member and former Tripura chief minister Biplab Kumar Deb has been made the election in-charge for Haryana. BJP leader Surendra Nagar will be the co-in-charge for elections in the state.

Former Bihar minister and BJP's in-charge for West Bengal Mangal Pandey has been appointed the election in-charge for the state. BJP leaders Amit Malviya and Asha Lakra will be the co-in-charges.

Nadda has appointed Mahendra Singh, an MLC in Uttar Pradesh, who has been a state minister in the past, as the BJP's election in-charge for Madhya Pradesh. Satish Upadhyay will be the co-in-charge for the state.Former Gujarat chief minister and BJP in-charge for Punjab Vijay Rupani has been appointed the election in-charge for the state, with Narinder Singh, a BJP National Secretary, as co-in-charge for elections in the state.

BJP has appointed former Uttar Pradesh minister Shrikant Sharma the election in-charge for Himachal Pradesh. Sanjay Tondon will be the co-in-charge. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

PM SAYS

`One nation, one legislative platform on the right path'

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said he was happy that Parliament and state legislatures were working towards realisation of the goal of 'one nation, one legislative platform'.

Addressing the 84th All India Presiding Officers' Conference (AIPOC) here virtually, he also ruled that some political parties defend their members even if they violate the rules of the House, and warned that it did not augur well for Parliament and state legislatures.

"In 2021, during discussions with you, I spoke about ₹one nation, one legislative platform.' I am happy that our Parliament and state legislatures are now working towards this goal through E-Vidhan and Digital Sansad platforms," the prime minister said.

Notably, the ₹one nation, one legislative platform' project aims at making available the proceedings of all legislatures on a single digital platform.

"There was a time when, if any member in the House broke the rules and action was taken against that member, senior members of the House would talk to him so that in future he did not repeat the mistake and break the rules of the House.

"But these days, some political parties stand in support of such members and defend their mistakes. The situation is not good for Parliament or state legislature," Modi said.

Reflecting on the changing norms in public life, he said in the past, allegations of corruption against a member of the House would lead to his or her ostracisation from public life.Referring to the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (legislation on women's quota in legislatures), Modi said discussions on suggestions aimed at enhancing women's participation and representation should be encouraged in legislatures.

Underling the pivotal role of state governments and legislative assemblies in shaping India's progress, Modi said the country's progress hinges on advancement of the states. The progress of the states, in turn, depends on the determination of their legislative and executive bodies to define their development goals collectively, he added. —*PTI*

Narendra Modi PHOTO: PTI

FLYING HIGH

Tri-service bands perform during rehearsal for the upcoming Beating Retreat ceremony, in New Delhi, on Saturday PHOTO: PTI

Kerala CM accuses govt of weakening democracy

T'PURAM, 27 JAN

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Saturday accused the Centre of weakening the democratic system in the country through its "attempts" to bring Constitutional institutions under control.

The Centre is making moves to hold sway over the Constitutional institutions including the Election Commission, he charged. The Chief Minister further alleged that the recent amendment brought to the Right to Information (RTI) Act was intended to make the (Central) Information Commission act in accordance with the whims and fancies of the political system which is in power at the Centre. —*PTI*

Min targets govt over Maratha quota

MUMBAI, 27 JAN

Maharashtra Minister Chhagan Bhujbal on Saturday appeared to target his own government led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde as he questioned the "backdoor entry" of Marathas into the Other Backward Classes (OBC) community.

He also termed the draft notification issued by the state government providing Kunbi certificates to all Marathas as a mere "eyewash", and said caste is determined by birth and not affidavits.

The veteran OBC leader was talking to reporters here after Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange called off his indefinite fast in neighbouring Navi Mumbai this morning after the state government accepted his demands over reservation to Marathas.

The state government issued a draft notification on Saturday to recognise as Kunbis all blood relatives of the Maratha community members whose Kunbi caste records have been found.

Kunbi, an agrarian community, falls in the OBC category. Jarange had been demanding Kunbi certificates for all Marathas.

Bhujbal, the food and civil supplies Minister, said, "The draft notification issued by the state government providing Kunbi certificates to all Marathas is an eyewash. It was a matter of study whether it is injustice to OBCs or Marathas are being taken for a ride." —*PTI*

Congress slams govt for ignoring people

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Hitting out at the Centre, the Congress on Saturday claimed that every second person in India is worried about "increasing inflation, economic recession, unemployment and conflicts" but the Modi government is busy "diverting" the attention of the country.

Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh shared a media report on X which claimed that in the last one year, the price of vegetables has increased by 15 to 60 per cent.Ramesh said, "Under the 'mehngaai kaal' of 'ahankaracharya', one in three Indians is worried about losing his or her job this year, while 57 per cent are worried about inflation."

He added, "every second person in India is suffering under 'anyay kaal' and worried due to increase in inflation, economic recession, unemployment and conflicts, but the Modi government is busy diverting the attention of the country in its familiar style."But the Congress will continue its struggle to give justice to the people, he asserted.Nyaya Yatra will start from Jalpaiguri Sunday afternoon, he said. Yatra has taken a pre-planned break after 12 continuous days and will resume on Sunday with a padyatra in West Bengal's Jalpaiguri. —*PTI*

EYEING LS POLLS

AP CM says target is 100% Assembly, LS seats

VISAKHAPATNAM, 27 JAN

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on Saturday sounded the poll bugle for the YSR Congress party for the upcoming Assembly and Lok Sabha polls saying it is a 'Kurukshetra war' comparing himself with the Pandavas while the Opposition TDP with the Kauravas (from the epic Mahabharatha).

Addressing a rally of his party workers titled "Siddham" (Ready) at Bhimili near here, Jagan said the YSRCP Government has fulfilled 99 per cent of the poll promises unlike the TDP which has allegedly "dumped its manifesto in the dustbin."

Reddy asked his party workers to go to every household and explain the development and welfare that have taken place PHOTO: PTI

- Addressing a rally of his party workers titled "Siddham" (Ready) at Bhimili near here, Jagan said the YSRCP Government has fulfilled 99 per cent of the poll promises unlike the TDP which has allegedly "dumped its manifesto in the dustbin."

Seeking votes for the YSRCP in the coming elections, Reddy said his government has disbursed Rs 2.53 lakh crore through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) without giving any scope for corruption and as many as 2.13 lakh government jobs were given in the past 56 months of his rule.

Attacking former chief minister and the Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu and describing him as a fascist, Jagan Mohan Reddy said Naidu has no guts to fight the polls without any political alliances and no face to seek votes with his past performance.

Predicting that there will be polls in the next 70 days, he asked his party workers to go to every household in the state and explain the development and welfare that have taken place. —*PTI*

India records 159 Covid-19 rise, active cases tally 1,623

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

India has registered a single-day rise of 159 new Covid-19 infections and the count of active cases of the disease stands at 1,623 in the country, the Union health ministry said on Saturday.One fatality due to the infection was reported in Kerala in a span of 24 hours, according to the data updated by the ministry at 8 am.The number of daily cases of COVID-19 in the country had dropped to double-digits by 5 December, but it began to climb after the emergence of a new variant and the cold weather conditions. After 5 December, the highest single-day rise of 841 new cases was reported on 31 December.Of the total active cases, around 92 per cent are recovering under home isolation."The currently available data suggests that the JN.1 variant is neither leading to an exponential rise in the new cases nor a surge in the hospitalisation and mortality," an official source said. *—PTI*

No let-up in cold wave in Punjab, Haryana

CHANDIGARH, 27 JAN

There was no let-up in the cold wave condition in Punjab and Haryana on Saturday with minimum temperatures staying below normal at several places. Hisar in Haryana was the coldest place as it shivered at 3.1 degrees Celsius, four degrees below normal, according to a report of the Meteorological Department here.Faridkot in Punjab was the coldest place in the state as it shivered at 3.6 degrees Celsius.Amritsar reeled at 3.7 degrees Celsius, one degree below normal, while Ludhiana and Patiala recorded their respective minimums of 6 and 6.5 degrees Celsius. Chandigarh, the common capital of the two states, recorded a minimum of 7.7 degrees Celsius. *—PTI*

Assam rhino killing: Poachers arrested, horn recovered

GUWAHATI, 27 JAN

Police have arrested "poachers" involved in the recent killing of a rhino in Assam's Kaziranga National Park, a senior official said on Saturday.The pachyderm's horn has also been recovered, Director General of Police (DGP) G P Singh said.A team led by Superintendent of Police of Golaghat district made the arrests, he said."Poachers have been arrested along with recovery of poached horn and the AK Rifle used in the poaching. Some more recoveries are yet to be made along with reconstruction of Crime Scene," Singh wrote on X.Singh however, did not specify the number of people arrested."Compliments to the entire team and supervisory officers. Our commitment to protect one-horned Rhinos is unwavering," he added. The carcass of an adult female rhino, with its horn missing, was recovered from the national park on 22 January. *—PTI*

Local BJP leader, wife murdered in MP; SIT formed

UJJAIN,27 JAN

A local BJP leader and his wife were murdered by suspected robbers at their residence in Ujjain district of Madhya Pradesh, police said on Saturday.The incident came to light on Saturday morning and a police Special Investigation Team (SIT) will also be formed for a probe, they said."Ramnivas Kumawat, a former sarpanch, and his wife Munnibai were found murdered, prima facie with sharp-edged weapon, in their house at Piploda village located on Dewas Road in Ujjain district," Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Guru Prasad Parashar said.The crime might have been committed during a robbery bid by unidentified people and further investigation is underway, he said. No gunshots were found at the spot and prima facie, stab wounds are considered the cause of the death. But the exact cause will be known through the post-mortem report, he said.*—PTI*

SC stays proceedings of reserved category case

A five-judge bench issued notice to the Bengal govt

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

SC also stayed the orders passed by the single-judge bench and the division bench in the matter which led to a public conflict between two judges of the Calcutta High Court ***PHOTO: PTI***

In a special sitting on Saturday, Supreme Court stayed all proceedings before Calcutta High Court in a matter relating to alleged irregularities in the issuance of reserved category certificates and admission of MBBS candidates in state-run medical colleges and hospitals in West Bengal.

Taking suo moto cognisance of the matter, a five-judge bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud issued notice to the West Bengal government and the original petitioner in the case. It also stayed the orders passed by the single-judge bench and the division bench in the matter which led to a public conflict between two judges of the Calcutta High Court.

"We will list the proceeding on Monday again. We will stay all further proceedings in the writ petition and the Letters Patent Appeal and the implementation of the single bench order referring the investigation to CBI," the bench said.The top court also allowed the filing separately of a special leave petition separately against the orders of Justice Gangopadhyay during the course of the day.

- The top court also allowed the filing separately of a special leave petition separately against the orders of Justice Gangopadhyay

The matter pertains to a Calcutta High Court judge defying a division bench order of quashing of an FIR -- ordered by him earlier -- in the alleged irregularities in MBBS admissions in the state.Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the West Bengal government, said the state is also filing an appeal against the initial single bench order for CBI enquiry.Solicitor General Tushar Mehta submitted that the high court's division bench's order appeared to be without jurisdiction as the stay order was passed by it without an appeal memo."I am more concerned about passing an order without an appeal memo or any impugned order in place. This court had under Article 141 prohibited the same. I am not here defending either a single judge or division bench order," Mehta said and sought permission for the CBI to file a note in this regard.A single-judge bench of Justice Abhijit Gangopadhyay on Thursday held that the order passed by the division bench of Justices Soumen Sen and Uday Kumar as wholly illegal and has to be ignored. *—PTI*

ED ISSUES FRESH SUMMONS TO JHARKHAND CM

Chief Minister of Jharkhand Hemant Soren ***PHOTO: PTI***

RANCHI, 27 JAN

Enforcement Directorate has issued a fresh communication to Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, asking him to again join the investigation in a money laundering case next week, official sources said on Saturday.

Soren has been asked to confirm his availability for questioning on either 29 January or 31 January, they said.The central agency had earlier asked the Jharkhand chief minister to join the probe on any date between 27 and 31 January but since there was no official response, it has issued a fresh letter-cum-summons to the 48-year-old politician, who is also the executive president of the ruling Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM). ED recorded Soren's statement for the first time in the case on 20 January after its investigators went to his official residence in Ranchi. The statement was recorded under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) *—PTI*

M'rashtra: Man killed in blast; probe ordered

BHANDARA, 27 JAN

- The incident occurred at the factory's location in Jawaharnagar on the outskirts of Bhandara city. The victim, identified as 52-year-old Avinash Meshram

A blast at the Ordnance Factory Bhandara in Maharashtra claimed the life of an employee on Saturday morning prompting authorities to initiate a probe to ascertain the cause of the accident, officials said.

The incident occurred at the factory's location in Jawaharnagar on the outskirts of Bhandara city.

The victim, identified as 52-year-old Avinash Meshram, was on duty when the explosion took place.Despite immediate efforts to rush him to the factory hospital, Meshram was declared brought dead.

Authorities at the factory have swiftly responded by constituting a three-member probe committee to investigate the cause of the blast as the circumstances leading up to the incident remained unclear, officials said.According to a factory spokesperson, employees from nearby departments rushed to the scene upon hearing the blast and discovered Meshram lying motionless. The authorities have initiated necessary measures to provide compensation and pension to the deceased employee's family.Bhandara Superintendent of Police Lohit Matani said that Meshram, a resident of Gondia district, was involved in the production of wires used for detonating explosives when the accident occurred within a building on the factory premises.

The Jawaharnagar police station's assistant inspector, Sudhir Borkute, said an accidental death report has been filed based on the information gathered so far.Additionally, Bhandara district collector Yogesh Kumbhejkar mentioned that a senior official from the Directorate of Industrial Safety and Health was dispatched to the blast site, while the deceased's body underwent post-mortem at the civil hospital.Surrounded by Satpura Mountain ranges, the factory, is a pioneer in the explosive and chemical group of factories and its products range from acids to high explosives and various propellants with the highest quality standards. *—PTI*

Somnath Temple: Guj govt razes over 150 huts

GIR SOMNATH, 27 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

A mega anti-encroachment drive was undertaken to clear around 3 hectares behind Somnath temple in Gujarat's Gir Somnath district that belonged to the temple trust and state government, officials said on Saturday.

As many as 21 houses and 153 huts that had unauthorisedly come up were being demolished to clear the land belonging to Shree Somnath Trust, which manages the activities of the revered Somnath temple, and the state government, said Collector Harji Vadhvaniya. The mega demolition drive began on Saturday morning in the presence of five 'mamlatdars' and around 100 revenue officials, Vadhvaniya said. Heavy police presence was also maintained to ensure that it went off peacefully, he said. The land, which measures 3 hectares (7.4 acres), will be cleared of encroachment and fenced as per a circular issued by the state revenue department, he said.Somnath temple is located in Prabhas Patan near Veraval town along the coast of the Arabian Sea. It is believed to be the first among the 12 jyotirlinga shrines of Lord Shiva and is an important pilgrim site and a tourist spot."We are working to remove unauthorised residential encroachment as per the circular issued by the revenue department and secure it with fencing. Before the exercise, we had called for a meeting with the representatives of the encroachers on 25 January to explain to them the entire process," the collector said.

He said the administration has ensured the availability of tractors and labourers to help the encroachers remove their household items and arrangements have been made to provide them food packets. *—PTI*

SPIRITUALITY BRIDGING GAPS

French President Emmanuel Macron, EAM S Jaishankar at the Sufi saint Hazrat Nizamuddin Awliya Dargah, sharing moments of spiritual reflection ***PHOTO: X***

ED CHARGESHEETS AGAINST TERROR GROUP

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Enforcement Directorate on Saturday said it has filed a money laundering charge sheet in connection with a terror financing case in Kashmir and has named some Hizbul Mujahideen terrorists in the complaint.

The prosecution complaint (charge sheet) was filed before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Srinagar on 25 January, the federal agency said. The accused named in it include Mudasir Ahmad Sheikh, Mushtaq Ahmad Kambay and Mohammed Iqbal Khan, it said.The court has taken cognisance of the charge sheet and issued notice to the accused for initiation of trial. *—PTI*

AIIMS uses drone to ship blood bag

BHUBANESWAR, 27 JAN

PHOTO: PIXABAY

AIIMS Bhubaneswar has used a drone to transport a blood bag from the institute here to a community health centre in Khordha district, an official said.

The inaugural drone flight on Thursday transported a blood bag from AIIMS Bhubaneswar to Tangi community health centre (CHC) in Khordha district, covering a distance of 60km in 35 minutes. The flight marked the first-ever drone-assisted blood delivery not only in Odisha but across the entire country, the institute claimed in a statement.

Ashutosh Biswas, executive director of AIIMS Bhubaneswar, said, "Delivering a blood bag to a patient through a drone has been successfully conducted for the first time. This initiative represents a significant leap in integrating technology into our healthcare system. It also collected blood samples from the CHC before returning to AIIMS.The drone service will help a lot in the delivery of critical medical items during natural disasters like floods and cyclones, he said.The 12kg drone, equipped to carry medical loads ranging from 2 to 5 kg, achieved a speed of 90 km per hour during the mission. Utilising GPS technology, the drone ensured the timely and secure delivery of essential medical supplies. *—PTI*

DIGGING THE PAST

ASI findings on Gyanvapi will be accepted by world: MP min

BHOPAL, 27 JAN

A survey by ASI suggests the mosque was built on the remains of a pre-existing temple ***PHOTO: PTI***

Madhya Pradesh minister Prahlad Patel has said the findings of ASI about Gyanvapi mosque will be accepted by the country and world, referring to the claim by the lawyer representing the Hindu litigants that the mosque was built after razing a temple.

The MP Minister of Panchayat Rural Development and Labour said in Jabalpur that Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), which carried out a survey at the mosque on Supreme Court's direction, is renowned not only in the country but across the world. "If anyone does the work of looking at history through the prism of history, it is ASI. Hence, the country and the world will accept its facts. The ASI's report presented before the court will enhance everyone's knowledge," he said on Friday.Patel, who is a former Union minister for tourism and culture, said ASI's retired officers go abroad for archaeological conservation and research work. ASI has an important contribution to the archaeology of the world, he stressed.The minister said the ASI experts involved in the Ram Janmabhoomi case were eminent archaeologists.Earlier, the lawyer of the Hindu petitioners in the Kashi Vishwanath-Gyanvapi case had claimed that the report of a survey by ASI suggests the mosque was built on the remains of a pre-existing temple.*—PTI*

HC suspends officials for criticising Modi

KOCHI, 27 JAN

Kerala High court has suspended two of its officials from service for allegedly showing derogatory content and criticising Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Central government in a stage show performed on Republic Day.

The Registrar General of the High Court said that both the officials -- one an Assistant Registrar (higher grade) and the other a Court Keeper (higher grade) -- shall be on suspension, with immediate effect, pending an enquiry into the incident and resultant disciplinary action.

"They (the two officials) shall return all government properties held by them, if any, including the identity card issued to them," the Registrar General said in the order issued on Friday.

The order also stated that the Chief Justice had directed the Registrar (Vigilance) to carry out a detailed enquiry about the incident and submit a report at the earliest.

"The Registrar (Administration) is directed to furnish a detailed explanation as to the circumstances in which the above said incident took place," it said.

The action against the two officials was taken following a complaint to the Kerala high court Chief Justice AJ Desai by the Ernakulam Legal Cell.

The complaint stated that staff of the high court and the Advocate General's (AG) office performed a skit "with an intention to defame the country"."The dialogues of the skit, mainly aiming to criticise the leaders and administrative heads of the country, especially depicting the words and style of the Prime Minister, is highly derogatory."it said and demanded strict action against the erring staff. *—PTI*

MP: Clash over Sardar Patel statue; 19 held

UJJAIN, 27 JAN

Police have so far arrested 19 people in connection with a clash over a statue in Madhya Pradesh's Ujjain district, and the situation is peaceful in the area amid heavy presence of cops, an official said on Saturday.Members of two communities had clashed and pelted stones at each other after a statue of former deputy prime minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was pulled down by unidentified people in Makdone tehsil on Thursday morning.The 19 people who were arrested have been booked for rioting and using criminal force to deter a public servant from performing their duty, said Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP-Rural) Nitesh Bhargava. He said markets are open in Makdone, and the situation is normal in the town. There is peace between both groups. *—PTI*

AN UNWAVERING COMMITMENT

Woman performs last rites of 4K unclaimed bodies

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Transforming grief into a mission, a 26-year-old woman in Delhi has been performing the last rites of unclaimed bodies for nearly two years now, right after losing her brother to a tragic death.

Pooja Sharma, a resident of the Shahdara locality has performed the last rites of several bodies that remained unclaimed in hospitals for long and possibly had no family connections to give them a dignified funeral. "In the last two years, I have performed the last rites of around 4,000 bodies with no known family or connections," Sharma claimed. "I lost my brother on 13 March, 2022 to a tragic murder. Since then, I have turned my personal tragedy into a source of solace for others," she added.

Shedding light on the tragic incident that changed the course of her life, Pooja said, "My elder brother, who was 30-year-old, was shot dead in front of me in a small fight, and after hearing this news, my father went into coma."Right after the second day of performing the last rituals for her brother, Pooja made an unwavering commitment to help others. Since that fateful day, Pooja has extended her caring touch beyond her immediate family, managing the tasks and responsibilities of those who are left with no one to look after them."I used to contact the police and government hospitals to seek information about bodies whose families or whereabouts remained unknown initially." However, now the police and government hospitals reach out to me if they have any information about an unclaimed body, she added.

Pooja claims to arrange for the last rites of these bodies with her grandfather's pension. "It takes around Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,200 for performing the rituals. I stay with my father and grandmother, and my father works as a contract-based driver in Delhi Metro. With my grandfather's pension, I arrange everything," she said.Highlighting the challenges and social prejudice faced by her for doing this work, Pooja said, "Many people see the work that I do as a taboo and my friends' families don't allow them to meet me." *—PTI*

FESTIVE MOOD

Elephants carry deity as part of 'Pallivetta' festival, at Valayanad Devi Temple in Kozhikode
PHOTO: PTI

India's 'last Jew' fights for a place in history

For years, Levi has been documenting the history of his family and other Jews who once lived in Chennai on his Facebook page
PHOTO: BBC

Davvid Levi claims to be the last Jew to have lived in the southern Indian city of Chennai.

That's because, according to government records, Levi's was the last Jewish family in the city, which is the capital of Tamil Nadu state. (The BBC could not verify if the last two Jews documented in Tamil Nadu according to India's census were Levi and his wife).

Levi left India for "security reasons" following a property dispute in 2020. He now lives in Germany with his family.

But Chennai, he says, will always be his first home and he's determined to preserve his community's culture and history.

More than 10 generations of the Levi family, which has Portuguese origins, have lived in Chennai, which was part of Madras province under British rule.

Levi's great-grandmother Rosa (he says she was named after the Tamil word for the rose flower) married Isaac Henriques De Castro, a diamond trader from Amsterdam who moved to Madras with her. The couple was killed in 1944 during the Holocaust in Germany while they were on a trip.

After their deaths, their only son and Levi's grandfather, Levi Henriques De Castro, returned to India.

For years, Levi has been documenting the history of his family and other Jews who once lived in Chennai on his Facebook page.

"I do this because I don't want the legacy of my ancestors to die with me," he told BBC Tamil.

But he now wants to scale up the mission to preserve his family's past. In 2020, he wrote to Tamil Nadu's archaeology department, requesting the state to take over his family's artefacts and preserve them in a museum.

The items include some sacred Jewish texts bound in silver, a few utensils used in religious rituals and other items from a now-demolished synagogue in Chennai, where Levi's grandfather was the last rabbi.

According to India's 2011 census, the country had 4,429 Jews, with just two recorded in Tamil Nadu. In 1921, Madras province had 45 Jews.

Officials from Tamil Nadu's archaeology department say they are considering Levi's request.

"Researchers are currently verifying the ownership and age of the objects," said T Udayachandran, the commissioner of Tamil Nadu's archaeology department.

He added that the verification would take at least another year, requiring examination by a team of expert archaeologists.

Local historians say the artefacts could be of great historical value as they offer insights into a lesser-known side of Jewish immigration.

Chennai was once a safe haven for Jews who fled Spain in the 17th Century after facing persecution, historian Venkatesh Ramakrishnan says.

Ramakrishnan says many of these families traded primarily in diamonds with their relatives in Europe.

"As their trade flourished, a street in Chennai was named after them, called the Coral Merchant Street, which exists to this day."

Historians say Levi's artefacts could also help throw light on the larger Jewish community in India.

Besides Tamil Nadu, Jews mainly settled in the southern state of Kerala; the western state of Maharashtra and along the Konkan coast; and in the eastern state of West Bengal. Most of them were traders.

But despite the rich legacy of the community, experts say their history is fast disappearing from public life and memory.

For instance, in Kerala, only three of the eight synagogues which were built between 11th Century and 16th Century remain now, says Karmachandran, a history professor who uses only one name.

"The Kerala government should protect these historical monuments because they show that India had been a country which encouraged religious diversity and harmony," Karmachandran says.

"The Jews lived a safe and peaceful life in India for many generations and their history is now India's history," he adds.

Even in Tamil Nadu, synagogues have faced neglect, Levi says.Chennai used to have two synagogues which were built in the 17th Century to cater to the small Jewish community.

But neither of them stand today, Levi says. The last synagogue in the city was demolished in 1968 to build a school.

"As the community dwindled, we couldn't fight back to keep our property," Levi says.

Ramachandra Vaithiyanath, a historian, says that none of Tamil Nadu's museums or cultural centres have any record of the Jewish community.

The Jews were "very much connected to the local people and their social movements" so it is only right that the state should accept Levi's demands and keep his family possessions in a museum, he adds.For Levi, however, the conservation project remains deeply personal. "These are sacred articles which were used by my ancestors with so much reverence," he says.

"They are a part of this city's history and mine." —*BBC News*

SALAR ساڈا

How therapy can help get back lost sense of smell

During the pandemic, a lost sense of smell was quickly identified as one of the key symptoms of Covid.

Nearly four years later, one in five people in the UK is living with a decreased or distorted sense of smell, and one in twenty have anosmia – the total loss of the ability to perceive any odours at all. Smell training is one of the few treatment options for recovering a lost sense of smell – but can we make it more effective?

Smell training is a therapy that is recommended by experts for recovering a lost sense of smell. It is a simple process that involves sniffing a set of different odours – usually essential oils, or herbs and spices – every day.

The olfactory system has a unique ability to regenerate sensory neurons (nerve cells). So, just like physiotherapy where exercise helps to restore movement and function following an injury, repeated exposure to odours helps to recover the sense of smell following an infection, or other cause of smell loss (for example, traumatic head injury).

Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of smell training under laboratory conditions. But recent findings have suggested that the real-world results might be disappointing.

Make better decisions - find out what the experts think.

One reason for this is that smell training is a long-term therapy. It can take months before patients detect anything, and some people may not get any benefit at all.

In one study, researchers found that after three months of smell training, participation dropped to 88 per cent, and further declined to 56 per cent after six months. The reason given was that these people did not feel as though they noticed any improvement in their ability to smell.

> Smell training is a therapy that is recommended by experts for recovering a lost sense of smell. It is a simple process that involves sniffing a set of different odours usually essential oils

Cross-modal associations

To remedy this, researchers are now investigating how smell training can be improved. One interesting idea is that information from our other senses, or "cross-modal associations", can be applied to smell training to promote odour perception and improve the results. Cross-modal associations are described as the tendency for sensory cues from different sensory systems to be matched. For example, brightness tends to be associated with loudness. Pitch is related to size. Colours are linked to temperature, and softness is matched with round shapes, while spiky shapes feel more rough. In previous studies, these associations have been shown to have a considerable influence on how sensory information is processed. Especially when it comes to olfaction.Recent research has shown that the sense of smell is influenced by a combination of different sensory inputs – not just odours. Sensory cues such as colour, shape, and pitch are believed to play a role in the ability to correctly identify and name odours, and can influence perceptions of odour pleasantness and intensity.

In one study, participants were asked to complete a test that measured their ability to discriminate between different odours while they were presented with the colour red or yellow, an outline drawing of a strawberry or a lemon, or a combination of these colours and shapes. The results suggested that corresponding odour and colour associations (for example, the colour red and strawberry) were linked to increased olfactory performance compared with odours and colours that were not associated (for example, the colour yellow and strawberry).

While projects focusing on harnessing these cross-modal associations to improve treatments for smell loss are underway, research has already started to deliver some promising results.

In a recent study that aimed to investigate whether the effects of smell training could be improved with the addition of cross-modal associations, participants watched a guidance video containing sounds that matched the odours that they were training with. The results suggest that cross-modal interactions plus smell training improved olfactory function compared to smell training alone.

The results reported in recent studies have been promising and offer new insights into the field of olfactory science. It is hoped that this will soon lead to the development of more effective treatment options for smell recovery.

In the meantime, smell training is one of the best things you can do for a lost sense of smell, so patients are encouraged to stick with it so that they give themselves the best chance at recovery. —*Courtesy, The Conversation*

According to one study, participation in the smell training declined to 56 per cent after six months as people did not feel as though they noticed any improvement in their ability to smell
PHOTO: PTI

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Medieval writing reveals hierarchy of our ancestors' pooches

The place of dogs in society changed when hunting became an aristocratic pastime, rather than a necessity
PHOTO: PIXABAY

In the middle ages, most dogs had jobs. In his book De Canibus, the 16th-century English physician and scholar John Caius described a hierarchy of dogs, which he classified first and foremost according to their function in human society.

At its apex were specialised hunting dogs, including greyhounds, known for their "incredible swiftnesse" and bloodhounds, whose powerful sense of smell drove them "through long lanes, crooked reaches, and weary ways" in pursuit of their prey.

But even the "mungrells" that occupied the bottom rungs of the canine social ladder were characterised in terms of their labour or status. For example as street performers, or turnspits in kitchens – running on wheels that turned roasting meat.

The place of dogs in society changed when hunting became an aristocratic pastime, rather than a necessity. Simultaneously, dogs were welcomed inside noble homes – especially by women. In both cases, dogs were signifiers of elite social rank.

Indeed, in his ranking, Caius positions the "delicate, neate, and pretty" indoor dogs below hunting dogs but above the base mongrels, because of their association with the noble classes. As for puppies: "the smaller they be, the more pleasure they provoke".

Although the church formally disapproved of pets, clerics themselves often owned dogs. Like women, clerics' dogs were generally lapdogs, ideally suited to their indoor pursuits.

In praise of dogs

Not everyone had such affection for dogs. Concerned about potential violence, urban authorities in England regulated the keeping of guard dogs, as well as violent popular entertainments, such as boar, bear and bull-baiting. In the Bible, dogs are often characterised as filthy scavengers. Proverbs 26:11 famously describes how they return to their own vomit.

On the other hand, the story of St Roch in The Golden Legend, a popular 13th century collection of saints' lives, tells of a dog who carried bread to a starving saint, then healed his wounds by licking them. One of Roch's saintly attributes, a motif by which viewers can recognise him, is a devoted dog.

The trope of dogs defending their owners or lamenting dead ones can be traced back to the classical period, to texts like Pliny the Elder's Natural History.

This theme is repeated in the medieval bestiary tradition, a moralising compendium of knowledge about animals both real and mythical. One common story tells of the legendary King Garamantes who, when captured by his enemies, is tracked down and rescued by his faithful dogs. Another tells of a dog who publicly identifies his master's murderer and attacks him.

The tale of one greyhound, Guinefort, even inspired an unofficial saint's cult. Writing in the 13th century, Dominican inquisitor and preacher Stephen of Bourbon described a noble family who, falsely believing the dog to have killed their infant, killed Guinefort in retribution.

Upon discovering the child unharmed (the dog had really saved it from a venomous snake), they honoured the "martyred" canine with a proper burial, which led to its veneration and alleged healing miracles. Although Stephen's story intended to reveal the sin and folly of superstition, it nonetheless underlines what medieval people perceived as the special qualities that distinguished dogs from other animals.

According to the Aberdeen Bestiary (c. 1200): "No creature is more intelligent than the dog, for dogs have more understanding than other animals; they alone recognise their names and love their masters."

The association between dogs and loyalty is also expressed in the art of the period, including in relation to marriage. In tomb monuments, depictions of dogs indicate fidelity of a wife to the husband who lies beside her.

In the case of clerical tombs, however, they may suggest the faith of the deceased, such as Archbishop William Courtenay (d. 1396), buried in Trinity Chapel, Canterbury Cathedral. Courtenay's alabaster effigy reposes atop a tomb chest on the south side of the chapel. The archbishop wears the robes and mitre of his office, and two angels support his cushioned head. A long-eared dog wearing a belled collar lies obediently at his feet.

Although it's tempting to wonder whether the dog depicted on Courtenay's tomb may represent an actual pet owned by the archbishop, the belled collar was a popular convention of contemporary iconography, especially for lapdogs.

Pampered pooches

A nude painting in which a woman looks in a mirror. At her feet is a white, pampered-looking dog.

Like their modern counterparts, medieval dog owners with means kitted out their companions with a variety of accessories, including leashes, coats and cushions made from fine materials.Such material investment was central to the aristocratic culture of vivre noblement, where the deliberate consumption of luxury commodities publicly demonstrated one's status.Popular perceptions of dog owning and accessorising also fed gendered stereotypes. Whereas men were more likely to own active dogs for the protection of their life and property, women preferred lapdogs they could cradle and pamper. Toy dogs, then, could also be associated with female idleness and vice, as seen in Hans Memling's painting Allegory of Vanity (c. 1485).

But even working dogs needed meticulous care and attention if they were to perform at their best. A miniature in a lavish 15th-century copy of Gaston Phébus's influential book Livre de la Chasse (Book of Hunting) shows kennel attendants examining dogs' teeth, eyes, and ears – while another bathes the paws of a very good boy. —*Courtesy, The Conversation*

US approves F-16 fighter jet sale to Turkey

WASHIGNTON, 27 JAN

The US government has approved the $23bn (£18bn) sale of 40 new F-16 fighter jets to Turkey - a move that had been long delayed - after Ankara ratified Sweden's accession to Nato. The deal includes modernisation kits for 79 existing Turkish F-16s. The US State Department told Congress it had also approved the sale of 40 F-35 fighters to Greece, costing $8.6bn. Turkey ratified Sweden's Nato accession after more than a year of delay that caused tension in the alliance. It first made the request for the jets in 2021, but its delay in ratifying Sweden's Nato bid proved to be a major stumbling block. Turkey was concerned over what it called Sweden's support for Kurdish separatists. But Turkish MPs ratified Sweden's bid this week and Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan gave his final sign-off. US President Joe Biden then urged that the F-16 sales be approved "without delay". *—BBC News*

11 terror suspects arrested in Pakistan

LAHORE, 27 JAN

As many as 11 suspected terrorists of ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and TTP have been arrested from different parts of Punjab province of Pakistan, the police said on Saturday and claimed it has foiled a "major terror plot." The terrorists include Muhammad Ejaz, a key commander of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), who took terrorism training in Afghanistan. He was nabbed from the Bahawalpur district of Punjab, some 400 kms from Lahore. The Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of Punjab police said that the terrorists had planned to sabotage across the province by targeting important installations. In a statement, they said Punjab police have foiled a "major terror plot" by arresting these 11 suspected terrorists. According to the CTD, it conducted 135 intelligence-based operations in different districts of the province during this week to effectively deal with any untoward incident of terrorism. *—PTI*

Japan bomber may have been found after 50 years

SEOUL, 27 JAN

For decades, the smiling mugshot of Satoshi Kirishima has featured on wanted posters outside police stations across Japan. After 49 years on the run, authorities think they may have got their man. A patient at a hospital near Tokyo has claimed he is Kirishima, a member of a militant group behind several deadly bombings in the 1970s. Police are waiting for DNA tests on the man, who was admitted under a different name suffering terminal cancer. Kirishima had belonged to the East Asia Anti-Japan Armed Front - a radical, left-wing organisation believed to be behind several bombings against companies in Japan's capital between 1972 and 1975. Eight people were killed in one attack committed by the group at the headquarters of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries in 1974. Japan's National Police Agency says on its website that Kirishima violated "criminal regulations to control explosives", and is wanted for "serial bombings of companies". *—BBC News*

'Monkey Man' trailer: Dev Patel turns John Wick

MUMBAI, 27 JAN

Actor Dev Patel is set to unleash his desi-John Wick in "Monkey Man", the upcoming action thriller set to release in theatres worldwide on April 5. Hollywood studio Universal Pictures unveiled the official trailer, featuring well-choreographed and spectacular fight and chase sequences, of the film, which also marks Patel's directorial debut, on Friday night. Inspired by the legend of Lord Hanuman, "Monkey Man" is set in Mumbai and features the "Lion" star as a man on a quest for vengeance against the corrupt leaders who murdered his mother and continue to systemically victimise the poor and powerless. *—PTI*

Trump must pay $83.3M for defaming E Jean Carroll

The penalty is made up of $18.3M for compensatory damages

NEW YORK, 27 JAN

A New York jury has decided Donald Trump should pay $83.3m (£65m) for defaming columnist E Jean Carroll in 2019 while he was US president.

The penalty in the civil trial is made up of $18.3m for compensatory damages and $65m in punitive damages.

Trump was found in a previous civil case to have defamed Ms Carroll and sexually assaulted her in the 1990s. He vowed to appeal the latest ruling, calling the case a witch hunt and the verdict "absolutely ridiculous".

In the latest trial, the jury was only required to decide how much compensation, if any, should be awarded to Carroll. The compensatory damages are meant to account for the harm that the jury found his comments had done to her reputation and emotional well-being.

Former president of US Donald Trump vowed to appeal the latest ruling, calling the verdict "absolutely ridiculous" ***PHOTO: PTI***

The panel also had to come up with a punitive penalty intended to stop Trump from continuing to speak out against her. It took the jury of seven men and two women less than three hours to reach a verdict on Friday afternoon.

Trump, who looks likely to be the Republican candidate in November's presidential election, also faces four criminal cases for a total of 91 felony counts. He is the first president in US history to be charged with a crime, but has pleaded not guilty or denied all the charges.

"This is a great victory for every woman who stands

- The panel also had to come up with a punitive penalty intended to stop Trump from continuing to speak out against her

up when she's been knocked down, and a huge defeat for every bully who has tried to keep a woman down," Ms Carroll said in a statement after the jury's decision on Friday. Her attorney, Robbie Kaplan, said in a statement: "Today's verdict proves that the law applies to everyone in our country, even the rich, even the famous, even former presidents."

Trump has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing, or even that he has ever met Ms Carroll, including on Friday morning.

But following the verdict he refrained from attacking her directly when he slammed the outcome of the case in a post on his social media platform, Truth Social.

"I fully disagree with both verdicts," he wrote, "and will be appealing this whole Biden Directed Witch Hunt focused on me and the Republican Party.

"Our Legal System is out of control, and being used as a Political Weapon. They have taken away all First Amendment Rights. THIS IS NOT AMERICA!"

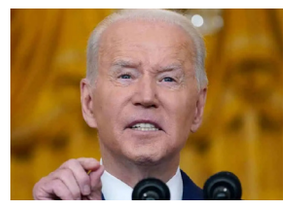
A civil trial last year found Mr Trump sexually assaulted Ms Carroll, a magazine columnist, in a Bergdorf Goodman department store dressing room in the 1990s.

That jury also found him liable for defamation for calling her accusations a lie - and he was ordered to pay her about $5m in damages. *—BBC News*

GAZA HOSTAGE DEAL

Biden calls zonal partners ahead of CIA chief's meet

WASHINGTON, 27 JAN



Joe Biden ***PHOTO: PTI***

President Joe Biden spoke on Friday with his Egyptian and Qatari counterparts ahead of a trip by his CIA director meant to press toward a deal to secure the release of more hostages held by Hamas in exchange for a pause to fighting with Israel in Gaza.

US National Security Council spokesman John vKirby said Biden spoke with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi and Qatar's ruling emir, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani. He added that while talks have been constructive, "We should not expect any imminent developments." "We continue to do everything we can to facilitate another hostage deal, just as we did in November," Kirby added.

CIA Director Bill Burns is slated to soon meet in Europe with David Barnea, the head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, and Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel, according to three people familiar with the matter who insisted on anonymity to discuss the sensitive talks. The meeting will focus on the release of hostages in exchange for a pause in hostilities. The Biden administration's hope is that an agreement could lead to an extended cease-fire that could eventually bring an end to the conflict, according to a US official. *—AP*

8 FEBRUARY POLL

Pak SC gives relief to some leaders of Imran's party

ISLAMABAD, 27 JAN

In a relief to the jailed former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's beleaguered party, the Supreme Court has allowed its president Parvez Elahi and some other senior leaders to contest the February 8 general elections.

Former prime minister of Pakistan Imran Khan ***PHOTO: PTI***

A three-member bench headed by Justice Mansoor Ali Shah and comprising Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail and Justice Athar Minallah on Friday heard Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) party president Elahi's appeal against the rejection of his candidature by the Lahore High Court (LHC) and the election tribunal.

The beleaguered Khan and his PTI have suffered blow after blow ahead of the polls with the election commission snatching away its iconic cricket bat symbol and rejecting nomination papers of 71-year-old Khan and several top leaders on multiple grounds.

The panel, after hearing the arguments, declared the decision to reject Elahi's nomination papers null and void and allowed him to contest the elections from a constituency of the Punjab assembly in his home province (PP-32). *—PTI*

TRADITIONAL CARNIVAL

Revelers march during a traditional carnival to celebrate the departing winter and forthcoming spring in the village of Hamry, Czech Republic on Saturday. The carnival is part of a centuries old tradition called the Shrovetide Procession which takes place in Eastern Bohemia near the end of winter and before Christian Lent. Experts trace the event, also known as Masopust, with its vibrant colors and archaic masks to pre-christian paganism, then common in the area ***PHOTO:PTI***

Pak Prez discusses hike in subsidised wheat prices

GILGIT-BALTISTAN, 27 JAN

Gilgit-Baltistan Governor Syed Mehdi Shah called on Pakistan President Arif Alvi and discussed the increase in the prices of subsidised wheat as the residents of the region announced that they would stage marches against the hike today (Saturday), as reported by The Express Tribune.

President Alvi told the governor that he had taken up the issue of the subsidised wheat price hike with the caretaker premier and finance minister.

Pakistan's president further hoped that the issue would be addressed soon. However, earlier, the elected members of the Gilgit-Baltistan Council called on the president to discuss the issue of the subsidised wheat rate hike, according to The Express Tribune.

Moreover, Alvi assured them that he would take up the matter at the relevant forums.

Meanwhile, the residents of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir's (PoK) Gilgit-Baltistan have been demonstrating and staging protests against the hike in the subsidised wheat price in the region. They have also pledged to stage demonstrations until the government withdrew its decision to increase subsidised wheat prices.

The Awami Action Committee (AAC) gave the strike call, in consultation with the associations representing traders, transporters and hotel owners, according to Dawn.

The call was issued after negotiations between an AAC delegation and the government to end the protest failed to produce any positive outcome, The Express Tribune reported. However, it was the next phase of the protest that has been going on for the last month against the Gilgit-Baltistan government's decision to raise the subsidised wheat prices. *—ANI*

Oil tanker on fire after Houthi attack

JERUSALEM, 27 JAN

- The Carney attack represents the first time the Houthis directly targeted a US warship since the rebels began their assaults on shipping in October

Yemen's Houthi rebels launched a missile on Friday at a United States warship patrolling the Gulf of Aden, forcing it to shoot down the projectile, and struck a British vessel as their aggressive attacks on maritime traffic continue.

The attack on the US warship, the destroyer USS Carney, marked a further escalation in the biggest confrontation at sea the US Navy has seen in the Middle East in decades, as Houthi missile fire set another commercial vessel ablaze on Friday night.

Early Saturday local time, US forces conducted a strike against a Houthi anti-ship missile that was aimed into the Red Sea and prepared to launch, the US military's Central Command said. The Houthis' Al-Masirah satellite news channel said the strikes happened near the port city of Hodeida, but offered no assessment of their damage.

The Carney attack represents the first time the Houthis directly targeted a US warship since the rebels began their assaults on shipping in October, a US official said on condition of anonymity because no authorization had been given to discuss the incident. Later Friday, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Operations, which oversees Mideast waterways, acknowledged a vessel had been struck by a missile and was on fire in the Gulf of Aden. *—AP*

'RUSSIA HAS NO PROOF TO BACK PLANE CRASH'

KYIV, 27 JAN

Officials in Ukraine said Russia has provided no credible evidence to back its claims that their own forces shot down a military transport plane carrying Ukrainian prisoners of war who were to be swapped for Russian POWs.

The Ukrainian agency that deals with prisoner exchanges said late Friday that Russian officials had "with great delay" provided it with a list of the 65 Ukrainians who Moscow said had died in the Wednesday plane crash in Russia's Belgorod region. Ukraine's Coordination Staff for the Treatment of Prisoners of War said relatives of the named POWs were unable to identify their loved ones in crash site photos provided by Russian authorities. The agency cited Ukraine's military intelligence chief, Kyrylo Budanov, as saying that Kyiv had no verifiable information about who was on the plane. *—AP*

Philippine troops kill nine suspected Muslim militants

MANILA, 27 JAN

Philippine troops killed nine suspected Muslim militants in the volatile south, including two key suspects in a bomb attack last month that left four Christian worshippers dead, the army said Saturday.

Four army scout rangers were slightly wounded in Thursday's operation against the Dawlah Islamiyah, a small outfit aligned with the Islamic State group, in the hinterland village of Taporug near Piagapo town in Lanao del Sur province, army spokesman Col. Louie Dema-ala said. Army forces clashed with about 15 militants in a series of shootouts from Thursday to Friday after some villagers tipped off the military of their presence, Dema-ala, adding that the surviving militants escaped and were being pursued.

Maj Gen Gabriel Viray III, an army infantry division commander, said the militants retreated from fierce exchanges of fire until they were trapped in a rural house, where they tried to fight back before being taken down.

Army forces clashed with about 15 militants in a series of shootouts ***PHOTO: PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE***

"We call upon the community to remain vigilant and collaborate with the army and government authorities as we collectively work towards eliminating the threat posed by local terrorist groups," the army said in a statement. Eight of the nine bodies had been identified, including those of Saumay Saiden and Abdul Hadi, who were among the suspects in the 3 December bombing that killed four Christian worshippers and wounded dozens of others during Sunday Mass in a state-run university gymnasium in southern Marawi city, he added.

Hadi allegedly assembled the bomb, which police investigators said consisted of a 60 mm mortar round and a rifle grenade, Dema-ala told reporters. *—AP*

China's is supporting N Korea: Experts

BEIJING, 27 JAN

Human rights experts have resisted China's latest claims that North Koreans fleeing into China are not political refugees but only illegal migrants seeking economic opportunities, emphasising that it is a way of supporting Pyongyang's authoritarian system, which is similar to China does, as reported by Voice of America.

Earlier this week, China claimed that North Koreans fleeing to China are not political refugees but only illegal migrants seeking economic opportunities. "There (are) no so-called DPRK defectors in China. People who illegally entered into China for economic reasons are not refugees," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said on Wednesday at a press briefing.

His statement came after South Korea called on Beijing to protect North Korean defectors in China during a Tuesday UN meeting examining China's rights records, according to VOA.

Notably, the meeting held in Geneva was the fourth review by the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review Working Group since February 2009. South Korea's ambassador to the UN office in Geneva, Yun Seong-deok, highlighted that Beijing should stop repatriating North Koreans. He further said that Beijing should consider making its refugee law comply with the 1951 Refugee Convention. *—ANI*

POLITICAL TURMOIL

Haitians suffering desperate gang violence

PORT AU PRINCE, 27 JAN

Radio stations across Haiti got jammed with calls just hours after a court in Kenya blocked the deployment of a UN-backed police force to help fight gangs in the troubled Caribbean country.

Many callers wondered and demanded: What's next?

Few know. Uncertainty and fear have been spreading since Friday's ruling, with violence reaching new records as gangs tighten their grip on Haiti's capital and beyond.

"Absent a robust external mission that would be deployed very soon, we are facing quite a tragic scenario in Haiti," warned Diego Da Rin with International Crisis Group.

Gangs that control an estimated 80 per cent of Haiti's capital have in recent weeks attacked and seized power of previously peaceful communities, killing and injuring dozens, leading to widespread concerns that they will soon control all of Port-au-Prince.

The number of people reported killed last year in Haiti more than doubled to nearly 4,500, and the number of reported kidnappings surged by more than 80 per cent to nearly 2,500 cases, according to the most recent UN statistics. Meanwhile, Haiti's National Police is losing officers at "an alarming rate", while those still in service continue to be overwhelmed by gangs, according to a UN report released this week. More than 1,600 officers left the department last year, and another 48 were reported killed.

The number of people reported killed last year in Haiti more than doubled to nearly 4,500 ***PHOTO: AL JAZEERA***

- The number of reported kidnappings surged by more than 80 per cent to nearly 2,500 cases, according to the most recent UN statistics

In addition, equipment sent by the international community to help bolster an underfunded police department has crumpled beneath heavy fights with gangs. Only 21 of 47 armoured vehicles were operational as of mid-November, with 19 "severely damaged during anti-gang operations or broken down", according to the UN report. The remaining seven vehicles "are permanently disabled," it stated.

"The situation has gone overboard. Enough is enough," said a man who identified himself as Pastor Malory Laurent when he called Radio Caraibes to vent about Friday's ruling. "Every day, you feel there is no hope." *—AP*

Microsoft Teams returns to normalcy after outage

WASHINGTON, 27 JAN

Microsoft's Teams services were restored on Saturday after a disruption blocked access to the messaging platform."After extended monitoring and mitigation efforts, we've confirmed that our Microsoft Teams service and features have been restored or have returned to optimal health," Microsoft said in its post on X. Several users had flagged issues with the messaging platform on Friday. Complaints peaked in the afternoon with more than 14,000 incidents, according to outage tracking website Downdetector.com. All incidents appeared to be resolved on Saturday. The company had earlier said it had identified a networking issue impacting a portion of the Teams service and said it was performing a failover. Microsoft Teams, widely used by professionals to schedule online meetings, chat, share files and many more. *—Reuters*

Yes Bank Q3 Results: Net profit soars 349.7% to ₹231.6 cr

MUMBAI, 27 JAN

Yes Bank Ltd's fiscal third-quarter profit surged more than fourfold but fell short of analysts' estimates. Net profit rose to Rs 231.6 crore for the quarter ended 31 December from Rs 51.5 crore a year ago, the bank said in a statement to stock exchanges on Saturday.The earnings, however, missed the analysts' estimate of Rs 415.1 crore as shared by MK Brokerages.The lender's gross non-performing assets (NPA) remained steady at 2 percent in the three months ended 31 December, while net NPA improved to 0.9 percent. Net interest income (NII) increased 2.3 percent from a year earlier. Operating profit rose 5.4 percent to Rs 864 crore.The bank also reported a 13.2 percent growth in deposits to Rs 2.4 lakh crore from last year.The current and savings account ratio saw a slight decline to 29.4 per cent. *—PTI*

Padmanabhan elected to the board of XBRL

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

IRIS Business Services Ltd, a leading provider of SaaS solutions for regulatory compliance and reporting, proudly announces that AnandPadmanabhan, President - IRIS Business LLC, has been elected to the board of XBRL International, further solidifying our commitment to advancing XBRL as a global standard for digital reporting. Bringing a wealth of experience from the industry, Anand's election to the board underscores the company's dedication to helping shape the future of business reporting. His strategic insights and forward-thinking approach align seamlessly with IRIS' mission to empower regulators and organizations with cutting-edge solutions for efficient financial and business reporting using the standard. "We are delighted to see Anand take on this important role with XBRL International," said K Balachandran, co-founder of IRIS. "His deep understanding of the industry and unwavering commitment to innovation make him an invaluable asset to the board. *—PTI*

Hrithik Roshan's 'Fighter' earns ₹41.20 cr on day 2

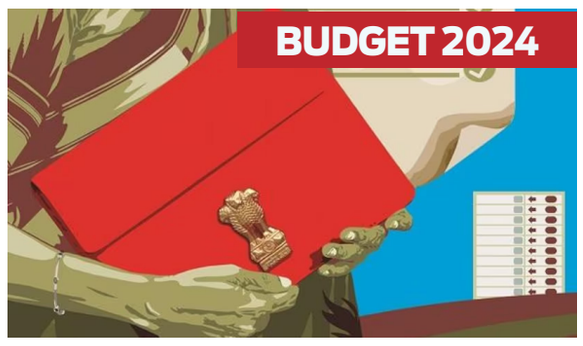
MUMBAI, 27 JAN

Bollywood star Hrithik Roshan's "Fighter" witnessed a "phenomenal jump" at the box office, raking in Rs 41.20 crore on day two of its release, the makers said on Saturday. Directed by Siddharth Anand of "Pathaan" and "War" fame, the movie is billed as a tribute to the valour, sacrifice and patriotism of the Indian armed forces. It was released in theatres on Thursday. Also starring DeepikaPadukone and Anil Kapoor, "Fighter" had earned Rs 24.60 on its opening day. "The film's momentum only soared, as day two witnessed a phenomenal jump, adding Rs 41.20 crores to the collection and achieving a grand total of Rs 65.80 crores," a press note from the makers. *—PTI*

IT benefits, support to women tycoons among expectations

They also demand for parity in taxation among companies

KOLKATA, 27 JAN



Interim budget which will be presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on 1 February *PHOTO: X*

An increase in income tax exemption limits, support to women entrepreneurs, a long-term taxation policy and steps to boost consumption and savings are among the expectations of experts from the interim budget which will be presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on 1 February ahead of LokSabha elections.

They also demand for parity in taxation among companies, partnerships and limited liability partnerships. "This is going to be an interim budget but at least there may be some indications of full-budget benefits. There may be some concession to be offered to individual taxpayers under section 87A under which the overall tax exemption limit may be increased to Rs 8 lakh from now Rs 7 lakh, inclusive of rebates," All India Federation of Tax Practitioners national president Narayan Jain said.

Bharat Chamber of Commerce president N G Khaitan said there is a need for a long-term taxation policy and parity in taxation among companies, partnerships and limited liability partnerships (LLPs) for a level playing field for small and medium firms. MSMEs, which have a huge contribution to the country's GDP and employment generation, are subjected to higher taxation, he said.

Khaitan also expects some actions to mitigate the burden on salaried persons with a reduction in the personal taxation front and boost consumption and savings. Bengal Chamber of Commerce's fiscal affairs and taxation committee chairperson VivekJalan expected that a simplified "single hybrid scheme" for personal income taxation incorporating certain deductions could be rolled out.

- An increase in income tax exemption limits, support to women entrepreneurs, a long-term taxation policy and steps to boost consumption and savings are among the expectations of experts from the interim budget which will be presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on 1 February

The government needs to prioritise its 'VasudevaKutumbakam' (the whole world is one family) roadmap and India's leadership role in green manufacturing, the expert said. Jalan hoped that customs duty on capital goods and raw materials like lithium-ion cells for electric vehicles to propel green energy initiatives could be reduced.

A government-facilitated settlement mechanism for customs disputes and a dedicated tribunal for handling GST-related cases may see the light of day. RadhikaDalmia, chairperson of FICCI Ladies Organisation (Kolkata chapter), advocated tax relaxations for women entrepreneurs and more paid holidays for working mothers. *—PTI*

DivineTalk Astrology is a pioneering app that provides astrological guidance by offering unique celestial guidance. *PHOTO: X*

DivineTalk Astrology plans to spend 65 Cr

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

DivineTalk Astrology, a premier astrology app, will spend a whopping amount of INR 65 Crores exclusively dedicated to its marketing in 2024. This substantial budget, translating to an impressive daily spend of 15-20 lakhs, signals DivineTalk Astrology's ambitious plans to increase market share and global expansion.

DivineTalk Astrology is a pioneering app that provides astrological guidance by offering unique celestial guidance. The company is dedicated to innovation and customer service, which are key to redefining astrology. Reports suggest that the global Astrology application is assumed to expand its market size at a CAGR of 24.76%, reaching USD 9715.98 million by 2028. The Founder and CEO of DivineTalk Astrology, Dr Paras Shah, explained his vision for the company's growth, focusing on the importance of globally expanding the brand's unique blend of astrology. He briefs, "The budget reflects the brand's commitment to providing high-quality astrological services. The brand is solely committed to providing valuable insights to its users, not only in India but across the globe."

Dr Paras Shah has been conferred with the Pride of Gujaratis 2023 for the 'BEST STARTUP AWARD for the STARTUP 2023 LIFESTYLE CATEGORY.' Allocation of such a significant amount on marketing reflects DivineTalk Astrology's confidence in its offering and commitment to maintaining its existing market position as one of the trusted astrology brands among users. Also, the application is expected to expand into new areas, making it more effective in both, the domestic and international markets. *—PTI*

'DigiYatra's data can be collected only after consent'

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Jyotiraditya Scindia *PHOTO: PTI*

DigiYatra is purely voluntary for air passengers and personnel at airports have been directed to collect data for the application only with the consent of passengers, according to Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia.

There have been complaints that biometric data for DigiYatra were being gathered from passengers without their consent and the issue was flagged to the minister by RajyaSabha member SaketGokhale. DigiYatra, which provides for contactless, seamless movement of passengers at various check points at airports based on Facial Recognition Technology (FRT), is currently available at a minimum 13 airports for domestic passengers.

In response to the member, Scindia has said that the issue was examined and "airport operators have been advised to sensitise Digi buddies on consent taking process and keeping use of DigiYatra completely voluntary". To support passengers with the use of DigiYatra, services of individuals called Digi buddies have been made available at the airports.

The minister, in a letter dated 24 January, told Gokhale that DigiYatra is a voluntary process for seamless and hassle free air travel which is purely voluntary. "Consent of passenger is pre-requisite for taking face biometric on kiosk based registration. Further, the data is automatically purged from the airport system after 24 hours of departure of the flight," Scindia said in the letter, a copy of which has been shared by Gokhale on social media platform X.

The data shared by a passenger for DigiYatra is stored in an encrypted format. For availing the service, a passenger has to register his or her details on DigiYatra app using Aadhaar-based validation and a self image capture. In the next step, the boarding pass has to be scanned and the credentials are shared with the airport. *—PTI*

Fund raising plan: SpiceJet receives first tranche of ₹744 crore

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

SpiceJet, which has been facing multiple headwinds, on Friday said it has received Rs 744 crore as the first tranche of funds being raised through allotment of securities on a preferential basis.

The airline had said it would raise fresh capital of Rs 2,250 crore through issuance of securities. According to a release, on January 25, the company's board of directors approved the allotment of 5.55 crore equity shares on a preferential basis to 54 subscribers. The airline has allotted shares and warrants totalling Rs 744 crore on a preferential basis in the first tranche.

The board has also approved the allotment of 9.33 crore warrants to Elara India Opportunities Fund Ltd and Silver Stallion Ltd. Meanwhile, the airline has requested for additional time from the competent authority to complete the process under the ongoing preferential issue, as per the release. The extension has been sought due to limited banking days arising from long weekends during the intervening period, the airline said without disclosing anay specific dates. *—PTI*

Collaboration must to become 3rd largest economy, says FM

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday said the initiatives of Customs department like Faceless Assessment and Single Window Clearance need to evolve with the overall objective of growth of trade as every partner needs to collaborate to help India's GDP surpass USD 5 trillion by 2027-28.

In a written message on the occasion of 'International Customs Day 2024', Sitharaman said with a common purpose of ease of doing business for nation building during India's 'Amrit Kaal', all the stakeholders need to come together and contribute for benefits to citizen of India.

She said this year's theme of International Customs Day, "Customs Engaging Traditional and New Partners with Purpose" resonates with the Motto of 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas' given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Every partner needs to collaborate to put India on course to becoming the third-largest economy by 2027-28, with a GDP surpassing USD 5 trillion," Sitharaman said. She added that many initiatives taken by Customs such as Faceless Assessment, Direct Port Delivery, Single Window Clearance, AEO Scheme need to evolve with an overall objective of growth of trade and business.

Special focus on MSMEs, new startups and inclusivity will align with the prime minister's vision, Sitharaman added. *—PTI*

Govt working on SEZ reforms: Commerce Secy

KOLKATA, 27 JAN

The government is working on reforms in the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) domain so that movement of goods between domestic tariff area (DTA) and SEZ space is carried out smoothly without affecting the competitiveness of goods in the export markets, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said on Saturday.

During the pandemic two years ago, many office spaces in the SEZ areas had been vacated due to 'work from home' practice initiated by the occupants. Barthwal said this had led to the demarcation of SEZs into SEZ and DTA spaces.

"Scale economies have become very important nowadays. Reforms in the SEZ are in the offing so that movement of goods from SEZ to DTA and vice-versa are not affected rendering goods produced become less competitive", Barthwal said at a symposium organised by the Bharat Chamber of Commerce. The official said that the foreign trade policy (FTP) of the government had been framed keeping in mind the global value chain. *—PTI*

OFFLOADED RS 24,734CR IN JAN

The latest data available from the National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL) showed that the FPIs sold Indian stocks worth Rs 24,734 crore in January. *PHOTO: PTI*

FPIs sold Indian stocks worth ₹24,734 cr in Jan

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

The latest data available from the National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL) showed that the FPIs sold Indian stocks worth Rs 24,734 crore in January.

"So far in January, equities experienced FPI outflows as investors exercised caution on Ems (emerging markets), partly in response to rise in US yields," CARE Ratings said in a report.

"However, FPI inflows in debt have sustained, supported by India's inclusion in JP Morgan bond index and potential inclusion in Bloomberg EM Local Currency indices, and have largely offset the equities outflows," CARE Ratings added.

The selling of stocks by FPIs lately has led to some corrections in Indian benchmark stock indices.

In December, especially, they made a beeline to invest in Indian stock markets, with a cumulative accumulation of Rs 66,135 crore.

To put it into context, the entire year saw an inflow of about Rs 171,107 crore, and notably, over one-third of it came in December. The strong inflow of funds from foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) had then supported the benchmark stock indices to march towards all-time highs.

In November, the FPI inflow was Rs 9,001 crore, NSDL data showed.

Before November, FPI participation in Indian stocks was lukewarm, and they had turned net sellers. They sold Rs 14,768 crore and Rs 24,548 crore, in September and October, respectively. Before that, FPIs bought Indian stocks worth Rs 7,936 crore, Rs 11,631 crore, Rs 43,838 crore, Rs 47,148 crore, Rs 46,618 crore, and Rs 12,262 crore in March, April, May, June, July, and August respectively, data showed. *—ANI*

Asia Pacific businesses are sprucing up investments in generative AI (GenAI) and projected to nearly triple spends on this technology to USD 3.4 billion in 2024 *PHOTO: PTI*

APAC to triple spends on GenAI to $3.4B

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Asia Pacific businesses are sprucing up investments in generative AI (GenAI) and projected to nearly triple spends on this technology to USD 3.4 billion in 2024 across Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, India, and Singapore, according to Infosys Research.

While the spending trails North America, APAC's adoption, effectiveness, and growth are among the highest globally, it said.

"Companies across Asia-Pacific are quickly ramping up investments in generative AI and entering a higher stage of maturity," the IT major's research arm, Infosys Knowledge Institute (IKI), said in the research.

While APAC companies currently lag behind their North American counterparts in GenAI spending, the research forecasts a bigger increase than in any other region, that is 140 per cent.

"This translates to an estimated USD 3.4 billion to be invested across Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, India, and Singapore," it said.

Infosys' Generative AI Radar APAC report includes insights from interviews with business leaders and AI practitioners and a survey of 1,000 respondents from Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, India, and Singapore.

Enterprises across APAC are investing heavily in GenAI. China leads the region, with investment expected to grow by more than 160 per cent to USD 2.1 billion, and Australia and New Zealand growth close behind.

"ANZ (Australia and New Zealand) investment is expected to grow by more than 150 per cent, from USD 60 million to USD 151 million in 2024," the research findings showed.

The biggest obstacles to APAC adoption are caution around responsible AI, concerns about the impact on reputation, and employee readiness.

Responsible AI (data privacy, data usability, ethics and bias) is a concern for APAC countries, though ANZ is less concerned about data usability. *—PTI*

SAFETY MEASURES

Meta tool to block nude images in teens' private messages

CALFORNIA, 27 JAN

Meta has said it will launch a new safety tool to block children from receiving and discourage them from sending nude images, including in encrypted chats later this year.

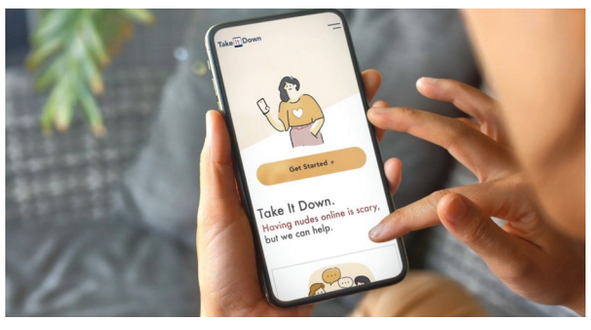
The tool is likely to be optional and available to adults too on Instagram and Facebook.

It follows criticism from government and police after Meta started to encrypt Messenger chats by default.

They say encryption will make it harder for the firm to detect child abuse.

According to Meta the new feature is solely designed to protect users, particularly women and teenagers - under-13s are not allowed to use its platforms - from being sent nude images or being pressured into sending them.

Earlier this month, police chiefs said youngsters sending nude images contributed to a rise in sexual offences committed by children in England and Wales.



And legal filings recently made public as part of a US lawsuit against Meta, allege company documents show an estimated 100,000 teenage users of Facebook and Instagram are sexually harassed online every day. Meta has accused the lawsuit of mischaracterising its work. Other messaging apps such as Apple's iMessage, Signal and Meta-owned already WhatsApp use the tech and have strongly defended the technology. Critics say platforms should client-side scanning technique to detect child abuse being sent via encrypted apps.

According to Meta its new feature is not client-side scanning, which it believes undermines the chief privacy protecting feature of encryption,that only the sender and recipient know about the contents of messages.

New tools

Meta argues it has introduced over 30 tools and resources to help keep children safe and on Thursday it also revealed a number of new child safety features.

By default children will be unable to receive messages on Instagram or Facebook Messenger from people they do not follow or are not connected to.

Meta policy already stops adults from messaging teenagers who do not follow them.

Parental supervision tools will now also give parents the ability to deny a teenagers' requests to change their default safety settings - such as who can direct message them or whether they can view more sensitive content. Previously they were merely notified of a change. *—BBC News*

Rohan Bopanna

WHEN AGE IS NOT A BAR

- Bopanna became the oldest Grand Slam champion
- Won 2017 Roland Garros mixed doubles title
- Captured 24 tour-level doubles titles with 14 different partners
- Bopanna was born in Coorg district, Karnataka
- Trained with Mahesh Bhupathi's father, CG Krishna

Sabalenka clinches back-to-back title

Won 3 finals in a span of 13 months

MELBOURNE, 27 JAN

Aryna Sabalenka clinched back-to-back Australian Open titles with a 6-3, 6-2 win over Zheng Qinwen on Saturday *PHOTO: X/AO*

Aryna Sabalenka clinched back-to-back Australian Open titles with a 6-3, 6-2 win over Zheng Qinwen on Saturday in a one-sided women's final. The No 2-seeded Sabalenka broke Zheng's serve in the second game and took the first set in 33 minutes. She broke again to start the second set and maintained her dominance throughout against the No 12-seeded Zheng.

"It's been an amazing couple of weeks. It's an unbelievable feeling right now," Sabalenka said in the trophy presentation. "As usual, my speech is going to be weird it's not my super power." Only two things slowed down Sabalenka's progress Saturday to her second Grand Slam singles title. In the third game of the second set, with Zheng serving, the match was interrupted after an activist started yelling out. The match continued after the man was escorted out by security.

Then, when she was serving for the match, Sabalenka had three championship points at 40-0 but missed two with wide or long forehands and another with Zheng's clever drop shot. After giving Zheng a breakpoint chance, she bounced the ball away behind her in disgust but she recovered her composure to win the next three points.

She needed five championship points before finishing off with a forehand cross-court winner. It was the kind of shot that had kept Zheng on the back foot almost from the start. Sabalenka improved to two wins in three Grand Slam finals, all in a span of 13 months.—*AP*

Hardik Pandya begins bowling full tilt

VADODARA, 27 JAN

Star all-rounder Hardik Pandya has begun bowling full tilt after rehabilitation from his ankle injury, clearly indicating that he is on course for the upcoming edition of the Indian Premier League where he will captain Mumbai Indians. Pandya, who sustained an ankle injury during World Cup last year, was seen bowling here in a video footage shared on his Instagram. "I feel good to be back. My journey started 17 years back at this same ground," said Pandya, who was seen sending down a few deliveries while also doing some running drills and exercises. "I am giving it all I got, every single day." Pandya, who was named Mumbai Indians captain in place of highly-successful Rohit Sharma on December 15 following a high-profile trade from Gujarat Titans, has been out of action after sustaining the injury in November during World Cup clash against Bangladesh. —*PTI*

Patna play out 32-32 tie with Puneri Paltan

PATNA, 27 JAN

Patna Pirates made a stunning comeback to play out a 32-32 draw against Puneri Paltan in the Pro Kabaddi League match here on Saturday. Puneri Paltan skipper Aslam Inamdar (13 points), Patna Pirates captain Sachin (nine raid points) and Mayur Kadam (five tackle points) were the key performers of the match. Patna Pirates came into the game following a win over Bengal Warriors, but were unable to ride the momentum in the early stages of the game and were at the receiving end of the first all out. Puneri Paltan's three-man raiding unit of Inamdar, Mohit Goyat and Pankaj Mohite chipped away at the home team's defence and a tackle from Gaurav Khatri on Manjeet in the 10th minute had the men in orange taking an 11-6 lead. Patna Pirates regrouped well and their raiders, led by captain Sachin, targeted Puneri Paltan's cover defenders to reduce the deficit. —*PTI*

Coman goes off injured in game against Augsburg

AUGSBURG, 27 JAN

Bayern Munich's injury concerns deepened as France forward Kingsley Coman went off hurt in Saturday's game against Augsburg. Coman was hurt seconds before teammate Aleksandar Pavlovic opened the scoring in the 23rd minute. Coman was challenging for the ball and seemed to be trapped between an Augsburg player and the goalpost. He was replaced by 18-year-old forward Mathys Tel. Any injury to Coman would cause more concerns for Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel, who is dealing with a range of injuries to key players in defense in midfield.—*AP*

NEED 156 FOR VICTORY

Aussies gain edge in 2nd Test against WI

BRISBANE, 27 JAN

- At the Stumps, Australia were 60/2 in 19 overs with Steven Smith batting on 33* and Green (9)*

After Josh Hazelwood and Nathan Lyon's blistering spells put Australia in control on Day three against West Indies, Steven Smith made a positive start to the hosts' chase of 216 in the second Test at The Gabba on Saturday.

At the Stumps on Day 3, Australia were 60/2 in 19 overs with Steven Smith batting on 33* and Cameron Green (9) standing unbeaten at the crease. The hosts need 156 runs to win the second Test game and clean-sweep the two-match series.

The visitors started the third session of Day 3 at 183 for the loss of six wickets. The visitors were able to play only 11.4 overs in the last session as they bundled out for 193 runs. The highest scorer for the side was Kirk McKenzie, who scored 41 runs off 50 balls with six fours.

For the hosts, the pick of the bowlers were Hazelwood and Lyon who snapped three wickets each in their respective spells after conceding 23 runs and 42 runs respectively. One wicket each was grabbed by Mitchell Starc and Green in their spells.

Chasing 216, openers Steve Smith and Usman Khawaja came out to bat. Australia gathered 24 runs before opener Khawaja was dismissed by Alzarri Joseph down the leg side. In the 11th over, Justin Greaves cleared up Marnus Labuschagne, whose edge was outstandingly caught by Kevin Sinclair in the slips. —*ANI*

Manoj Tiwary piles up another ton as Bengal dominate Assam

Bengal players celebrate the wicket of Assam batter Akash Sengupta during the 2n day of the Ranji Trophy cricket *PHOTO: PTI*

GUWAHATI, 27 JAN

Skipper Manoj Tiwary's 100 was among the highlights for rampant Bengal who reduced Assam to 99/8 on the second day after piling up 405 in their Ranji Trophy Group A contest, here on Saturday.

Tiwary, who became only the fourth Bengal player to score 10,000 runs for his state on the opening day, resumed at 68 not out and piled up his 30th first-class ton, making 100 off 264 balls with nine fours.

However, the veteran Anustup Majumdar could only add five runs to his overnight total as he was dismissed for 125 (253 balls, 16 fours). The 39-year-old Tiwary's effort took Bengal to a strong 405 in the first essay, with their total getting a further push by half-centuries from Karan Lal (52) and Suraj Sidhu Jaiswal (52), who both added 74 for the eighth wicket.

Bengal bowlers then got into the act here at the ACA Stadium in Barsapara to dismantle Assam. Denish Das's 50 and Saahil Jain's unbeaten 36 notwithstanding, Mohammad Kaif (3/32), Jaiswal (3/25) and Ankit Mishra (2/22) left Assam reeling at 99/8 at stumps, still a massive 306 runs behind in the first innings.

Mumbai vs UP

It was not a happy homecoming for Mumbai at the Wankhede Stadium with the Ajinkya Rahane-led side conceding a huge 126-run lead in the first innings to visitors Uttar Pradesh on the second day.

UP captain Nitish Rana smacked a 120-ball 106 (12 fours, 5 sixes) and Samarth Singh's 63 (107 balls, 8 fours) powered them to 324 in reply to Mumbai's moderate 198. Royston Dias (3/54) and Shivam Dube (3/32) shared six wickets between them but could not stop UP from gaining advantage.

In reply, Jay Bista (15 not out) and Bhupen Lalwani (9 not out) ensured Mumbai remained unscathed at stumps, trailing by another 102 runs in the second essay. —*PTI*

DAY 3: IND VS ENGLAND

Ollie Pope celebrates his century on the third day of the first test match at Rajiv Gandhi Stadium, in Hyderabad *PHOTO: PTI*

Ollie Pope's 148 leads visitors' fightback

HYDERABAD, 27 JAN

- Pope and Ben Foakes (34) milked 104 runs for the sixth wicket alliance to keep India at bay, stretching the match into the fourth day

Ollie Pope transformed the RGI Stadium into a gladiatorial fighting arena with a doughty hundred as England reached 316 for six to temporarily resist India's push for a win on the third day of the first Test here on Saturday.

Pope (148 batting) and Rehan Ahmed (16 batting) were guarding England's second innings fort at close and the visitors are now 126 runs ahead of India, an unimaginable position at the dawn of the day. India were bowled out for 436 in their first innings after building a lead of 190 runs. It was quite remarkable how Pope, who generally resembles a cat on a hot tin roof in these conditions, mustered fortitude and technical perfection to defy the Indian bowlers, who were primed to finish the match on day three itself, reducing England to 163 for five.

But Pope and Ben Foakes (34) milked 104 runs for the sixth wicket alliance to keep India at bay, stretching the match into the fourth day. It wasn't that Pope had complete command in the middle as spinners on occasions beat him for turn and pacers deceived him outside the off-stump. There was even a reprieve for him on 110 when Axar Patel grassed a fairly straight chance at backward square leg off Ravindra Jadeja when the batter attempted a reverse sweep. But the 26-year-old Essex man found a way to push those distractions away from his thoughts to build on individual and the team's score. Pope, whose main source of runs were sweeps and reverse sweeps, duly completed his first Test hundred, fifth in his career, against India off 154 balls, leading England's recovery act.

It was a massive effort from a batter who had just 384 runs from nine Tests against India at an average of 24 with a highest of 81 before this innings. —*PTI*

KALINGA SUPER CUP FINAL

Odisha FC, East Bengal FC seek triumph

BHUBANESWAR, 27 JAN

The stage is set for a thrilling encounter as these two football powerhouses lock horns *PHOTO: AIFF*

Finalists Odisha FC and East Bengal FC are fueled by various motivating factors, all contributing to the desire to conclude their Kalinga Super Cup campaigns on a positive note.

Securing trophies stands as a distinctive measure of success for any football club. As Odisha FC and East Bengal FC face off in the final showdown of the Kalinga Super Cup at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar this Sunday, both sides enter the clash with a shared determination to emerge victorious.

Having displayed resilience by remaining unbeaten throughout the group and knockout stages, Odisha FC and East Bengal FC are now gearing up for one last push.

The final serves as a platform for them to potentially resume the Indian Super League (ISL) 2023-24 season with the prestige of a title win, leaving an indelible mark on their overall campaign.

The pursuit of success is intensified by the fact that both teams have navigated through the challenges of the Kalinga Super Cup unbeaten, adding an extra layer of significance to this championship clash. As they approach the final showdown, Odisha FC and East Bengal FC are fueled by various motivating factors, all contributing to the desire to conclude their Kalinga Super Cup campaigns on a positive note. The stage is set for a thrilling encounter as these two football powerhouses lock horns, each aiming to etch their name in the annals of the Kalinga Super Cup history with a triumphant finish to their campaign.

As the Kalinga Super Cup 2024 reaches its pinnacle, defending champions Odisha FC find themselves in a formidable position to script a title win at their home turf. The team, under the guidance of head coach Sergio Lobera, has not only met but exceeded expectations in the ongoing tournament, securing significant victories against formidable opponents. —*ANI*

WE'RE MOTIVATED TO PLAY AT OUR BEST: ANCELOTTI

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Real Madrid manager Carlos Ancelotti feels that the fixture against Las Palmas in La Liga will be challenging as it would not be easy to score goals against their opponent.

"We will try to perform at our best in a game that could be difficult because Las Palmas play very good football and defend really well. It's going to be a demanding game. We're motivated to get back to playing at our best and be more solid at the back. The team is in good shape; we have everyone available except for the long-term injuries. We're looking forward to it," Ancelotti said. Talking about Jude Bellingham's replacement, Ancelotti said that players like Brahim Diaz and Joselu may be considered. —*ANI*

INDIAN WOMEN'S HOCKEY

Deep Grace Ekka announces int'l retirement

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Indian women's hockey team defender and penalty corner specialist Deep Grace Ekka on Saturday announced her international retirement, ending an illustrious career during which she represented India in two Olympic Games.

"It is with immense gratitude and humility that I officially announce my retirement from International Hockey today. The journey from 2011 to 2023 has been the highlight of my life, and I am deeply honoured to have represented India at the pinnacle of the sport," Ekka said in a social media post. The 29-year-old was instrumental in India qualifying for the 2016 Rio Olympics. She was a vital cog in the team's defence line at the Tokyo Games where India finished fourth.

Ekka was also a member of Indian team that won bronze in the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games. She also represented the Indian teams that won medals in 2014 and 2018 Asian Games. She was also a member of the title-winning Indian teams in 2016 Women's Asian Champions Trophy and 2017 Asia Cup.

Ekka began her journey in international hockey as a 17-year-old in 2011 when she made her debut in the Four-Nation Tournament in Argentina. She then went on to play in the U18 Girls Asia Cup in Bangkok, Thailand and her strong performance led her to become a regular feature in the National Camp.

"To my teammates, coaches, mentors, and the entire support staff – your presence has been nothing short of a privilege. I am grateful for your instrumental role in transforming my aspirations into reality," Ekka said. —*PTI*

The 29-year-old was instrumental in India qualifying for the 2016 Rio Olympics *PHOTO: X/HOCKEY INDIA*

Olesen takes 4-shot lead at Ras Al C'ship

RAS AL KHAIMAH, 27 JAN

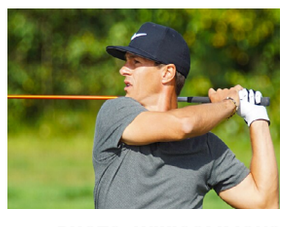


PHOTO: WIKICOMMONS

Thorbjorn Olesen will take a four-shot lead into the final day of the Ras Al Khaimah Championship after shooting a 9-under 63 in the third round on Saturday.

Olesen made 10 birdies to go with a lone bogey on the par-3 seventh hole to surge past fellow Dane Rasmus Hojgaard into a commanding lead on a 22-under total of 194. Olesen shot a 62 on Friday but felt that Saturday's round was even better.

"I hit a lot more fairways today, and that gave me the chance to be aggressive with the second shots. It was nice to find so many fairways. It was a great round again," he said.

Hojgaard shared the overnight lead with Manuel Elvira but settled for a 68 to sit alone in second place, two shots ahead of Frederic Lacroix (66).

Elvira also shot 62 on Friday but followed it up with an uneven 72 that included four bogeys, one eagle and two birdies to fall into a tie for seventh.

The tournament is the third straight European tour event to be staged in the United Arab Emirates. —*AP*